

J. STERLING MORTON

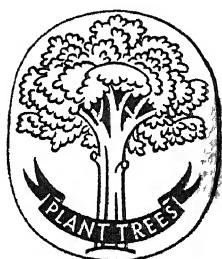


J. STERLING MORTON

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BY

JAMES C. OLSON



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PREFACE

J. STERLING MORTON is honored throughout the world as the founder of Arbor Day. A statue of him stands in the Hall of Fame in the nation's capitol. In Nebraska City, Nebraska, his home for almost half a century, there is another statue of the Nebraska Tree Planter. This latter one was erected in part by pennies, nickels, and dimes contributed for the purpose by school children from all over the world. On Arbor Day, April 22, 1932, the United States Government issued a postage stamp in commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Arbor Day, which was also the centennial of the birth of its Author.

Every school boy is familiar with Morton's work on behalf of the forestation of the treeless plains, and his efforts to popularize tree planting throughout the country. This aspect of Morton's life was known and appreciated by his contemporaries. They also knew him in another light, one that has been somewhat forgotten by a later generation. They knew him as a vigorous and colorful writer, a forceful and entertaining speaker, a Democrat who clung tenaciously to the traditions of the party, a conservative from a section of the country that seemed for a time to produce only radicals, a man who, though virtually always in the minority, was ever a force to be considered. His friends knew him as a man of genial personality who, despite his many stern convictions, was easy to get along with. They knew also of the simplicity and beauty of his home life, and of the close devotion between him and his wife and sons.

This study is the first attempt at a full length biography of J. Sterling Morton. It was written as a doctoral dissertation, and was made possible by the establishment of a fellowship in history at the University of Nebraska by Mr. Mark Morton, of Chicago, the only living son of J. Sterling Morton. The author has had free access to

the large collection of papers left by J. Sterling Morton, which have lain virtually untouched since his death, and hitherto have not been available for research. This study is based primarily upon Morton's papers (described in the Bibliography). Working with them, the problem has been one of the selection rather than the collection of source material.

I am deeply grateful for generous help received throughout the preparation of the biography. Mr. Mark Morton has placed every facility at my disposal, and has patiently answered innumerable queries about the life of his father. Mr. Sterling Morton has been ever ready to take time from his own busy schedule to discuss the work, and to provide me with information concerning his grandfather. At no time, however, has he, or Mr. Mark Morton, attempted in the slightest to influence me in my judgments.

Superintendent N. C. Abbott, of the State School for the Blind, Nebraska City, who probably more than any other man during the last quarter century has worked to popularize the celebration of Arbor Day, has been particularly close to the work. He placed at my disposal his large collection of information on Arbor Day, and his pioneer work on Morton's youth. He supervised in detail the selection of illustrations, many of them from his personal collection. He read the entire study, both in manuscript and proof, and made many valuable suggestions. Together we followed the trail of Morton from Adams, New York, to Nebraska City. Frequent conferences with him have been of inestimable value.

Having Professor James L. Sellers, of the University of Nebraska, as my graduate adviser has been a rare privilege. It would be impossible to acknowledge adequately the benefits I have received from association with him personally, and in classes and seminars. As far as this study is concerned, each chapter has had the advantage of his mature scholarship and sound judgment.

Professor Sherlock B. Gass, of the Department of English in the University of Nebraska, read a large portion of the manuscript, and suggested many structural improvements. Mrs. Clarence S. Paine contributed valuable genealogical information. Miss Emily Schosberger, Editor, the University of Nebraska Press, suggested many improvements while preparing the manuscript for publication. The staffs of the University of Nebraska Library and the Nebraska State

Historical Society were always ready to cooperate to the fullest. Many others aided generously, especially my wife, who typed the entire manuscript.

While acknowledging valuable assistance rendered me, I cheerfully accept full responsibility for any defects, or errors in fact or judgment the work may contain.

JAMES C. OLSON

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By Rudulph Evans

STATUE IN HALL OF FAME, WASHINGTON
Also Sculptured by Rudulph Evans

PART ONE

RK BEGINNINGS

called *The Censor*.³ The family lived in Adams until 1828 when Abner Morton bought the paper he was editing and moved it to the bustling city of Watertown, fourteen miles to the north.

The next year the first of Abner Morton's seven sons, Julius Dewey Morton, acquired a stock of goods and opened a general store in the village of Adams. Soon after venturing into business he married Emeline Sterling, daughter of Joseph Sterling, a local businessman. The young merchant had opened his business on borrowed capital, and, as he did not propose to go further into debt, forsook the comfort of a separate dwelling and took his bride to live in the tiny rooms above the store. In these rooms at three o'clock on the morning of April 22, 1832, the first of their three children was born.

The young parents (the husband was twenty-four and the wife but twenty) named their first-born Julius Sterling Morton—Julius after his father, of course, and Sterling in honor of the mother's side of the family. To avoid confusing his name with that of his father, the boy soon dropped the Julius in favor of Sterling, and during most of his life signed his name "J. Sterling Morton." This resulted in confusion regarding his own given name, and in later years he occasionally was referred to as John, or James, or some other common name beginning with the letter "J."

The boy's surname indicated his ancestry. The name Morton evolved from the English "moor-ton," the farm or enclosure on the moor. As early as 1273 we hear of Robert de Morton in the Hundred Rolls of County Nottingham, Egidus de Morton in those of County Northampton, and Richard de Morton in those of County Oxford. The name is ancient and honorable. It is found in the Battle Abbey Rolls, the Norman Rolls, and the Domesday book. English history contains the names of numerous Mortons who have contributed honorably to the development of their country. One Albertus Morton, for example, who lived from 1584 to 1625, was Secretary of State; a John Morton (1420–1500) was Archbishop of Canterbury; Thomas Morton (1564–1659) was Bishop of Chester; and a Dr. Richard Morton (1637–1698) was a famous physician and surgeon.⁴

³ Haddock, *loc. cit.*

⁴ *American Families* (limited ed., New York: American Historical Society, Inc.), 132.

The modern members of the Morton family have all been distinguished for their independence of thought and action; and from the hazy knowledge we have of the family's deep past, it seems probable that this characteristic existed in its early members as well. The Mortons were of that independent Puritan stock that found itself highly uncomfortable under the restraints of the Established Church which was an integral part of the royal government. George Morton who, according to legend, was the progenitor of the family in America, became a Puritan in 1600, and was one of the earliest of the sect to settle in Leyden, Holland. He also was one of the first to become dissatisfied with life among the Dutch, and returned to England where he served as an agent of the Puritans in the negotiations for the use of the "Mayflower." He did not accompany that first group of Pilgrims, but sailed later on the ship "Ann." Before sailing for Plymouth and acting in his capacity as agent and promoter, George Morton compiled the first book published in Great Britain about New England. This he called, "*Mourt's Relation of the Beginning and Proceeding of the English Plantation settled at Plymouth in New England.*" The book was written from reports sent back by the Mayflower pilgrims and was first published in 1622. The last years of George Morton's life are sheathed in obscurity. Some authorities say he returned to England; and others, that he died in Plymouth.⁵

The next Morton of whom we have much definite information is Richard, who was found on the records of Hartford, Connecticut, for 1669.⁶ Not much is known about Richard Morton except that he was a blacksmith by trade and that in 1670 he removed to Hatfield where he died in 1710. The want of information about Richard is typical. Except for their names, places of residence, and perhaps something of their occupations, little is known of any of the early members of the family in America. From what knowledge is available, however, it appears that they were, for the most part, men of responsibility and position within their own communities. Samuel

⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶ The exact relationship between George and Richard has not been definitely established, though Richard probably was a grandson. Because of this ambiguity in the two men's relationship, some authorities have preferred to say that Richard was the progenitor of the family in America. Family tradition, however, has it that the line descends from George.

Morton, for example, a great-great-grandfather of J. Sterling Morton, was one of the founders and for many years a leading citizen of the town of Athol, Massachusetts.⁷

J. Sterling Morton's maternal ancestors, the Sterlings, had been in America since the middle of the Seventeenth Century. The immigrant on his mother's side was William Sterling, who was born near London in 1637. He came to America during his young manhood, though the exact date is not known. He settled in Salem, Massachusetts, and later moved to Lyme, Connecticut, where he died in 1719, having married four times and begotten eighteen children. William Sterling's descendents continued to reside in the vicinity of Lyme until Joseph Sterling, Emeline's father, moved to Adams in 1808.

The Sterlings appear to have been rather prominent in Lyme, and the part of the community in which they resided was named Sterling City. Daniel Sterling, a son of William, was made Ensign in 1718 of the first "train band" (militia company) in the town of Lyme by the general assembly of the colony. He also seems to have acquired important rights to the water power of the community. Another Sterling, Captain William, Emeline's grandfather, in addition to holding many town offices, was a captain in the Connecticut State Militia, and in 1781 was one of a committee to "purchase and procure Provision for ye officers and soldiers familys that are in the Continental Service."⁸

Among J. Sterling Morton's more immediate ancestors, his father and grandfather stand out as men of unflagging energy and vigor. Likewise, both were men of ability, though his father's success in life, at least in a financial way, was much greater than that of his grandfather.

Grandfather Abner Morton was impeded by ill health during most of his life; nevertheless, he lived eighty-nine years and until his death retained a vigorous, active mind. A poor boy, determined to get an education, he put himself through Dartmouth College by teaching school to earn the money to pay for his board, room, and tuition. This attempt to combine the vocations of teacher and stu-

⁷ Mrs. Clarence S. Paine, "J. Sterling Morton and Allied Families" (Ms. in possession of author).

⁸ *Ibid.*, quoted from the Revolutionary Rolls of Connecticut.

dent was only partially successful. His wages as a teacher were only \$4 a month, plus board; and earning a living demanded so much time that during the four years of his college career he was able to attend class only thirty-two weeks in all. Nevertheless, he was allowed to graduate with his class in 1799. He worked with great diligence, as his record attests, and it was the effort expended in his struggle to get an education that undermined his health and left him weakened for the rest of his life. Following his graduation, he studied law and was admitted to the bar of Vermont; but the practice of law proved uncongenial and most of his life was spent not in the law but in a newspaper office.

Abner Morton was never successful financially, and during most of his life he felt the pinch of poverty, if not of actual want. Of course, editing a country newspaper was certainly not the road to riches in the early Nineteenth Century, but Abner complicated his position by eternally espousing unpopular causes, and persistently plunging into controversial issues. In the days when "Old Hickory" was riding the crest of his great popularity, Abner Morton was violently anti-Jackson; as the struggle over Freemasonry waxed warm, he plunged into the thick of the fight by giving his papers such names as "The Anti-Masonic Intelligencer," and "The Anti-Masonic Censor"; and at a time when whiskey almost more than bread was the staff of life, Abner Morton was advocating prohibition!⁹ Even so, his vigorous, trenchant pen won him a considerable following in the localities served by his various papers, and while in Vermont he was elected to a number of local offices and to two terms in the state legislature. He was a man of strong convictions, and stood firmly by them without regard for consequences; and though tracing ancestral traits may be dangerous, Abner Morton's utter devotion to principle was so strikingly like the characteristic which developed in his grandson to a marked degree that one cannot but notice the resemblance.

J. Sterling Morton's father, Julius Dewey Morton, was the first of Abner Morton's seven sons. The eldest of a large family always in straitened circumstances, J. D. Morton early was thrown upon his

⁹ Bound volumes of the papers edited by Abner Morton are available in the Morton Collection, and in the Nebraska City, Nebraska, Public Library.

own resources. His first employment was as a clerk in the general store of W. P. McKinstry in the town of Redman not far from Adams. A short time later, and while still a mere boy, he obtained a position in the large New York wholesale house of Woolsey, Poore, and Converse. He combined the scrupulous integrity he had inherited from his father with sound business habits, and these traits combined with a willing industry made it possible for him to acquire to an unusual degree the confidence of his superiors.

The story is told that so marked were J. D. Morton's business abilities and honesty that his first employer, Mr. McKinstry, when at the point of death, summoned him from New York to close up his business, selecting him, though yet a boy, in preference to men of much greater age and experience. This duty performed, the boy returned to New York where he remained until he reached the age of twenty-one.¹⁰

It was upon reaching his majority that J. D. Morton decided to go into business for himself, and opened the general store in Adams. The stock of goods was obtained on credit from his former employers. The young man had gained their confidence as he had that of W. P. McKinstry.

The building which served as emporium for his business and residence for his family at the time his eldest son was born still stands, although it has been altered in some respects from its original form and changed as to location. It now stands at the top of Whitcomb Hill, upon the west side of South Main Street, as the road leads out of town on the route to Syracuse. It is a small, modest structure, built on the square lines typical of much of the architecture in western New York. It is now used solely as a residence, and the wide door through which J. D. Morton's customers passed has been made into a smaller aperture, though its former outlines are still plainly visible.

The young merchant advertised frequently in his father's paper, and from these advertisements some information may be gathered relative to rural merchandising in the early Nineteenth Century. All alike, the advertisements informed the public from week to week in type of varying size that "J. D. Morton has just received a fresh

¹⁰ *Detroit Commercial Advertiser*, undated clipping containing obituary of J. D. Morton (Morton Collection).

and elegant assortment of Dry Goods, Groceries, Crockery, and Hardware which he intends to sell, for ready pay, as cheap as can be bought at any store in Jefferson County. Those desiring to get goods cheap will do well to improve the present opportunity.”¹¹

In the Eighteen-thirties, as at other times, the farmers frequently were unable to make cash payments for their store goods, and merchants in rural communities often found it necessary to accept produce of various kinds in payment for their merchandise. J. D. Morton not only was willing to do this, but encouraged it as a means of increasing his business and providing another avenue of profit. He frequently advertised that he was in need of “1000 lbs. of butter,” “5000 bushels of rye,” and similar products, offering to pay for the same half with cash and half with merchandise from the store.

Young J. D. Morton, with New England pertinacity, let pass no opportunity to get the most out of his business. He augmented his income by acting as an agent for the New York Consolidated Lottery, which was flourishing at the time. Lotteries were a favorite means of raising money for all sorts of projects, public and private. Churches and colleges especially found them valuable. Tickets sold at prices ranging from three to ten dollars, “with shares in proportion,” and the prizes ranged all the way up to \$25,000. One of J. D. Morton’s tickets had actually won a prize of \$250 and subsequent advertising exploited to the fullest this great stroke of fortune.¹²

Business was good in Adams and the young merchant prospered. Soon after Sterling was born, his father moved the business into more commodious quarters, “the new stone store south side of the creek.”¹³ It is probable, considering his beginning, and the resourceful industry with which he looked after his business, that, had J. D. Morton remained in Adams, he would have amassed a very respectable competence and might even have become one of the village’s wealthiest citizens, as did his Uncle Elihu who had migrated from Vermont with Abner in 1817. He doubtless realized the limitations of the backwoods village, however, because he did not remain long in Adams.

¹¹ *Jefferson Reporter* (Adams, New York), bound volume for 1832 (Morton Collection).

¹² *Ibid.*

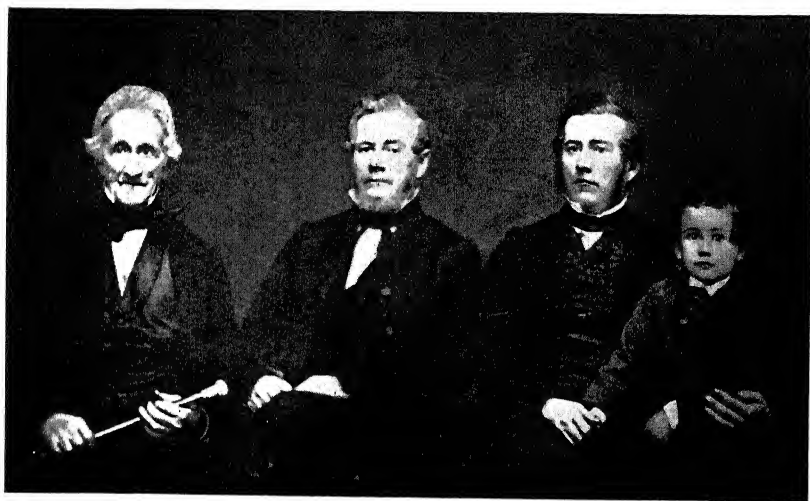
¹³ *Ibid.*, June 19, 1832.

For several years there had been much talk of the new settlements in southern Michigan. The face of the nation was turned West. In terms of years, Adams was still a new settlement, but already men were leaving to go still farther west. Great things were in the making out in the country of the Northwest Ordinance. The climate, the fish, the game, the lumber, and best of all, the fertile soil at \$1.25 an acre, were enthusiastically discussed. As a matter of course, J. D. Morton heard some of this talk, and it is not too much to believe that the wonders of Michigan may have formed the topic of many a cracker-barrel conversation around the stove in his store. His father, Abner Morton, being a newspaper man, probably heard and talked more about the new land than he.

In any event, in the spring of 1834 the Mortons, father and son, decided to leave New York and venture into Michigan. Abner Morton was sixty-nine years of age, but when his oldest son decided that greater opportunities were to be found in the West, he did not feel too old to pack up the rest of his family and his printing press, and go along.



BIRTHPLACE OF J. STERLING MORTON, AT ADAMS, NEW YORK



THE FOUR GENERATIONS:

ABNER
MORTON

JULIUS D.
MORTON

J. STERLING
MORTON

JOY
MORTON



Julius Sterling Morton

My Dear Sir, As you requested,
I here give you the number of
the days of my years up to,
and including this 31st day of
March 1886, being 31,598 days.
Your affectionate Grandfather

Abner Morton.

A LETTER FROM GRANDFATHER ABNER MORTON, AGED EIGHTY-SIX

CHAPTER TWO

MICHIGAN BOYHOOD

THE FAMILY DECIDED upon Monroe, on Lake Erie a few miles south of Detroit, as the likeliest location in the new territory. It is doubtful whether they could have found in 1834 a town with more brilliant prospects.

Monroe's population was only about sixteen hundred, but it had grown from less than five hundred in four years and equalled Chicago in size and volume of business. Because its position on Lake Erie was nearer to the East by the whole length of Lakes Michigan and Huron, Monroe's prospects were considered superior to those of the town growing up on the site of old Fort Dearborn. The bustling little village was a natural port for southeastern Michigan. The daily stages between Detroit and Buffalo carried its mail and passengers, and railroads were chartered to connect it with the interior.¹

Further augmenting Monroe's claim to importance was the fact that men of prominence and known good judgment had made their homes there, and in 1835-36 a group of men known as the Cass Company are said to have speculated heavily in the neighboring lands.² They took their name from Lewis Cass, second Governor of the territory of Michigan and member of President Jackson's cabinet, who was the leading spirit of the group. Cass' association

¹ George Newman Fuller, *Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan* (Lansing, 1916), 156.

² *Ibid*

with Monroe and Michigan, as later events were to prove, was an important factor in the life of J. Sterling Morton, for Lewis Cass was one of the men who, seeing in young Morton promising political timber, advised him to seek his fortune in Nebraska, and exerted influence to give him a conspicuous start in the public life of the new territory.

The Mortons found occupation immediately after their arrival in Monroe. Abner Morton set up his printing press, and though there already was one paper in the town, started another, calling it *The Monroe Journal and Michigan Inquirer*. This name was short-lived, for with his son Edward, Abner Morton bought out the competing paper, *The Sentinel*, combined it with the other one, and changed the name to *The Monroe Advocate*.³

Julius Dewey Morton, after being connected for short periods with two of the town's banks, decided to take advantage of Monroe's position as a shipping point, and entered into the produce and commission business. The firm was first Morton, Burch, and Co., then Morton and Wing, and subsequently Morton and Walbridge.

Opportunities for profit were abundant in the rapidly developing community. Applying the same industry and good business habits which had characterized him as a boy, J. D. Morton prospered. By constant and careful attention to business he was able to supply his family with all of the comforts which pioneer Michigan could afford. Moreover, he was solicitous for their spiritual well-being, and never were the demands of the material world allowed precedence over those of the spirit. For in addition to being a man of thrift and sound business judgment, J. D. Morton was a devout Christian and practicing Methodist. He reared his family—increased while in Monroe by the birth of a boy, William, and a girl, Emma—according to the tenets of Methodism. In his later years, after he had removed to Detroit, he served as a trustee of the Central Methodist Church of that city, and at the time of his death in 1864 was President of the Board of Trustees of the Methodist college at Albion. His strong religious sentiment was ardently supported by his wife, who became widely known for her piety and good works.

Piety, however, was one trait which was never very fully developed in young Sterling. He was a bright boy, and the older members of

³ Michigan Pioneer Society, *Collections and Proceedings*, VI:89.

the family delighted in telling of his cleverness and brilliance. This naturally tended to spoil the child and encouraged him to seek to be smart, even something of a "smart-aleck,"⁴ and perhaps a bit stubborn about having his own way. In J. Sterling Morton's own words, as a child he "was chiefly remarkable for willfulness and a general desire to do precisely as . . . [he] had a mind to."⁵

He may have been a little hard on himself in this statement, but the stories that have come down to us concerning his childhood all tend to show that even at a very early age he was developing that independence of thought and action which later so distinguished his career as a politician and statesman.

The story is told that once when only three years old, the boy chanced while at prayer to see his Uncle Edward come into the room. Uncle Edward—J. D. Morton's brother, who was in the newspaper business with his father—was fond of tormenting the boy, and young Sterling, noticing the family cat nearby, felt that the combination of circumstances was too good to miss. So with the words, "Lord, excuse me," he rose from his devotional position beside his mother's knee and threw the cat at the offending relative.⁶

A little later, when he had arrived at the dignity of eight years, Sterling accompanied his mother to New York to visit an aunt who was lying dangerously ill. The doctor gave orders that the lady's hair must be sacrificed to the fever. Sterling was in the room when the beautiful tresses—fiery red—were cut off and thrown upon the floor. The boy, so the story goes, sat for a long time thoughtfully regarding the beautiful red hair. No one else gave much thought to the aunt's tresses until a few weeks later when she was pronounced out of danger. Then a great cry went about the house as to what had become of the hair. It had seemed to disappear by magic in the anxiety over the aunt's health. The house was searched from top to bottom, and finally even small Sterling was called upon to help in the search. Whereupon, the future author of *Arbor Day* is reported to have opened his eyes very wide and said, "Why, I took

⁴ N. C. Abbott, "Sterling and Caroline, Their Salad Days" (Ms. in possession of author), 4.

⁵ Morton to his Mother, April 22, 1859 (Unless indicated otherwise, all letters cited are from the Morton Collection).

⁶ Louise R. Baker, "The Boyhood Days of Hon. J. Sterling Morton," *Leslie's Weekly*, April 30, 1896.

it. I gave it to the robins to build their nest; they didn't have any sticks and I knew they'd be glad to get it." ⁷ The wonderful red nest, admired by fond relatives that day, was for many years preserved in the Morton family.

More entertaining than anecdotes fabricated by others, and probably of greater value, are J. Sterling Morton's own words concerning his boyhood: ". . . when about twelve [I] became interested in the art of chicken fighting and the cultivation of intimate friendships among the Dutch, Irish and French, probably with an eye to obtaining their votes at a later day. How well I loved . . . [their] refined society I will not attempt to express. For two years & a half or more I luxuriated extensively in the capacity of a general vagabond in the quiet city of Monroe, an example to the sons of all the high aristocracy of the place of the evils of being the son of J. D. Morton and one that wouldn't mind his parents at that—my impression now is that my future when spoken of at that time was generally mentioned . . . in intimate connection with jails, state prisons and hangmen." ⁸

Sterling attended a private school of sorts in Monroe, though much of his early education was received in the newspaper office of his Uncle Edward.⁹ Even at an early age Sterling was very fond of his Uncle Edward, and to a certain extent imitated him, adopting his ideas, independence, and even his style of composition. There was a more truly marked resemblance between uncle and nephew than between father and son.

What of this uncle who so decidedly influenced the mind of young Sterling?

Edward G. Morton was associated with the newspaper business from the age of fourteen when at his own request he was apprenticed for six years to learn the trade of a printer. Going into the newspaper business with his father in Monroe, he gradually assumed the entire management of the office. Despite the fact that he had had but a few educational advantages—he attended school in all for less than a year—E. G. Morton gained rather wide recognition as a news-

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Morton to his mother, April 22, 1859.

⁹ Abbott, *loc. cit.*

paper man, and was characterized as "sharp, incisive and keenly alive to the weak points of the enemy."¹⁰

He was active in politics and at various times was elected mayor of Monroe, and a member of five Michigan state legislatures. Politically, he always was an ardent Democrat. His opposition to President Lincoln during the Civil War was described as "very bitter."¹¹ Quotations from his war editorials illustrate his uncompromising nature as well as his vigorous style. He attributed the cause of the conflict to "the damnable sectionalism of the North," and charged that "the abolitionists in their greed of office were determined to prolong the strife as long as possible, destroy the country and raise hell itself."¹² He asserted that the Republican party in Michigan was as much in rebellion as the state of South Carolina, except that it was not in arms.

Politically, J. Sterling Morton was much influenced by his Uncle Edward, and early in life became an ardent Democrat. Sterling had an original mind and did not arrive at his political conclusions solely in imitation of his uncle, for he gave the problem much thought himself. It is only reasonable to suspect, however, that much of his thinking, especially in its early stages, received its inspiration from the associations of the newspaper office. Surely, he did not become a Democrat because of the influence of his father; for J. D. Morton was early interested in the Republican movement, and often deplored his son's Democratic views.

About the time Sterling reached the age of fourteen his parents decided that he should be given other educational advantages than those offered by Uncle Edward's newspaper office and the schools of Monroe; and being good Methodists they selected Wesleyan Seminary, located in the village of Albion, about one hundred miles to the north and west, as the place where those advantages might best be secured. Thus, as Morton later put it, he was sent, much against his will, to spend some time in the "Methodistical and sedate town of Albion."¹³

The purpose of Wesleyan Seminary, according to its catalogue for the year 1847-48, was "to confer a critical and thorough English

¹⁰ *Michigan Biographies* (Lansing, 1924), II:125.

¹¹ George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, 1923), 525.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Morton to his mother, April 22, 1859.

education, and to give instruction both in the Ancient and Modern Languages and the General Principles of Science." Lectures were offered each quarter on chemistry, natural philosophy, astronomy, science, history, and education. These were supplemented by a library of about six hundred volumes, also furnished with "some of the first periodicals from New York, Boston, and Cincinnati," to which the students had access by paying twelve and one-half cents per quarter.¹⁴

The institution insisted upon the most decorous and sober deportment on the part of its students, and the catalogue contains an elaborate set of rules by which their actions were to be governed. All students were, "to rise in the morning at the ringing of the bell, sweep and adjust their rooms; and to assemble in the chapel for prayers, morning and evening, at the tolling of the appropriate bells. . . . To indulge in no hallooing, loud talking, running, jumping, whistling, or other disturbance, in the rooms or halls of the Seminary. . . . To visit no taverns, groceries, or other places, for pleasure or entertainment, to use no intoxicating liquors or tobacco in any form . . . and to use no profane or vulgar language of any description. Strictly to observe the Christian Sabbath, to make no noise, or disturbance, on that day, not to go abroad into the fields or village, or to collect at each other's rooms without permission, to carry no fire-arms, deadly weapons or gun-powder on the Seminary premises. . . . " ¹⁵

Without a doubt, the mischievous young Morton found certain aspects of such a regimen difficult indeed. In later years, speaking of his life at Albion, he said: "I achieved the enviable reputation of being so full of the Devil that the very pores of my skin were said to exude the essence of diabolism." ¹⁶

The story is told that during a "bad butter" siege at the Seminary, Sterling was accused of smearing the upper hall door with butter and was arraigned before the faculty. He at once pleaded guilty and upon being asked why he had committed the misdemeanor, the boy replied: "I was trying to see if the butter were strong enough to pull the handles off the doors." ¹⁷

¹⁴ *Catalogue of the Corporation, Faculty and Students of the Wesleyan Seminary at Albion, Michigan, for the Year 1847-48* (Detroit, 1848), 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

¹⁶ Morton to his mother, April 22, 1859.

¹⁷ Baker, *op. cit.*

Another instance in which Sterling might be accused of levity in his attitude toward the authorities has been reported in connection with the distribution of report cards. This occurred at the end of each term, and as a public occasion, it was one of the most impressive functions of the year. At one of these ceremonies young Morton is supposed to have risen after the distribution of the cards, marched to the platform on which the faculty was seated in state, and said in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear: "Professor, you have made a mistake in my card. You have given me a mark that I don't deserve."

"Explain that, please."

"You have marked me on deportment, and everyone knows that I have paid no attention to deportment." ¹⁸

Life at Albion, however, was not all mischief; for while Sterling may have been one of the merriest and most fun-loving of the Seminary's students, he early impressed his associates with his creative ability, enthusiasm, and intelligence. Samuel Clements, a young man studying for the ministry whom J. D. Morton had requested to act as a special friend to his son, became intimately acquainted with the boy and reported that he found him a youth of excellent physical constitution, of a fine nervous temperament, generous, eager, and intelligent. It was early noticed that Sterling had a special interest and aptitude for literature and politics.

Another minister, and friend of the family, wrote Sterling after having seen a specimen of his writing: "It promises well for the future, when your judgment shall have become matured and the faults of your style—which are the faults of many young writers, and only want more practice to correct them—shall have been rectified." ¹⁹

Sterling was president of "The Clever Fellows," a Seminary literary society. The group attempted to publish a magazine and Sterling evidently was the prime mover of the project. Of the first—and possibly only—issue, he wrote to his father: "It consisted of about thirty pages over 1 third of which I wrote, and all of which came under my emediate [*sic*] care." ²⁰

Morton himself, who in later years was inclined to speak with

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ (Rev.) Robert Southgate to Morton, July 1849.

²⁰ Morton to his father, no date.

facetious disparagement of his youth, wrote of his career at Albion: "Very fortunately for me . . . I found some boys there who knew a great many things that I did not, which gave me some chagrin which finally aroused an ambition to excel even in me, and I did 'pitch in.' " ²¹

It is very probable that one of the reasons why he did decide to "pitch in" was the presence of a certain girl on the campus—a very beautiful and altogether charming girl who from the first completely captivated him.

This girl was Caroline Joy French who had been born on August 9, 1833, at Hallowell, Maine, the only daughter of Hiram Joy and Caroline Hayden. The name French she acquired from her foster parents, Deacon David and Cynthia Eldred French. In the spring of 1835, a year after Hiram Joy brought his little family from Maine to Detroit, his wife had died leaving him with the tiny girl. Caroline Hayden as a parting request to her beloved neighbors, Deacon and Cynthia French, had asked that they take her infant daughter. The Frenches had no children of their own. With the approbation of the bereaved father, they accepted the charge, and the child used the surnames of both families, Caroline Joy French.²² For a time Caroline had two fathers, and as both of them were men of some means, every reasonable indulgence was lavished upon her. In 1850, however, father Joy removed from Detroit to Chicago, and the contacts between father and daughter were not so frequent as before while relations with her foster parents grew in intensity.

Morton was fond of recalling in later years that his wife had been taught the domestic arts at a very early age: ". . . She was in the habit of taking charge of the house of her foster father and mother . . . for a month at a time. During these periods of experimental housekeeping she did the marketing and kept the accounts; and, in short, ran the entire establishment. . . ." ²³

When Caroline entered Wesleyan Seminary, at Albion, in the fall of 1847, she was fourteen years old and had previously attended an Episcopal girls' school opposite Detroit in Canada. Sterling was

²¹ Morton to his mother, April 22, 1859.

²² James M. Woolworth, *In Memory of Caroline Joy French Morton* (Chicago n.d.), 8-10.

²³ Morton to Paul Morton, November 30, 1897.

fifteen and was beginning his second year. The Wesleyan Seminary was a small institution, and without a doubt the youngsters became acquainted with each other before many days of the school year had passed. And with them, becoming acquainted meant falling in love, for as Caroline later said, they "fell for each other at first glimpse."²⁴

Young Morton, who was never one to delay in doing a good work, proposed an immediate engagement. Caroline accepted, and there under the grand old trees of Albion, the girl fourteen, and the boy just past fifteen, plighted eternal love.

Traditionally, sophomore affections are not considered serious matters, and doubtless the fondness which the two young people expressed for each other was dubbed by unbelieving oldsters as "puppy love" and forthwith dismissed. Such cynicism, however, was to prove completely unfounded in the case of Sterling and "Carrie."

For three years, under the watchful eyes of the Wesleyan faculty, they studied together on the campus at Albion. Then came a period of separation while they finished their educations: Caroline at the celebrated school for girls operated by the Misses Kelly in Utica, New York; and Sterling at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

²⁴ Abbott, *op. cit.*, 1.

CHAPTER THREE

"A REMOVED STUDENT"

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN in which J. Sterling Morton matriculated in 1850 presented by no means the imposing array of magnificent buildings and well-kept lawns that it does today. It was at the edge of town, and of such rustic appearance that visitors thought they were "really out in the country." The only buildings on the campus were the North and South Colleges, the four professors' houses, and a portion of the medical building. The campus itself looked like a large farm meadow, and was indeed mowed regularly for the crop of hay which it yielded.¹

The North College building was occupied as a dormitory except for the first floor which was used as a library and museum. The furnishings were exceedingly simple. Each room was supplied during the winter with a small box stove for heating purposes, and during the months when heat was not needed these stoves were piled in the upper halls for storage. It was no infrequent occurrence that one of them "got up in the night and rolled downstairs."²

Upon entering the University Morton was installed in a room on the fourth floor. Early in October, however, his roommate, a youth named Chase, left school and young Morton, in order to avoid paying \$4.50 a term more for room rent and wood, moved down into the second story with Elihu Pond of Coldwater, "a young man of

¹ Charles M. Perry, "Dr. Tappan Comes to Michigan," *Michigan History Magazine*, X (April 1926), 210.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

good moral character and virtuous habits—a first rate student and a good clever fellow.”³

Morton entered upon his studies determined to achieve success. Early in his freshman year, he wrote to his father: “My ambition to be *somebody* is slowly wakeing [*sic*] up and if I can only keep straight, be contented and have my health, no one knows what I may not attain to.”⁴

He kept a diary intermittently while in the University, and during his freshman year in particular there are expressions of resolution to do good work and to improve his time to the best possible advantage. On January 5, 1851, for example, he wrote: “Resolved today upon turning over a new leaf in the book of my existence, and writing thereon Honesty, Industry and Stoicism. Shall I?” Again, on February 1: “. . . Have lost the day, in it accomplished nothing good. Must commence a new account tomorrow morning. And I will! Shall not play checkers again in a week.”

The young man also expressed in letters to his parents his determination to succeed, though these expressions, in proverbial college-boy fashion, often were combined with requests for additional funds, as was the following bizarre letter written shortly after the Christmas holidays during his sophomore year:

Per date of this letter you will perceive, that I am in the right location and learn that my situation meets my expectation. It may be to you a subject of congratulation that I have such accommodation as would suit the President of our Nation—But I am as lonesome as “darnation” yet think my education will receive no degradation—but rather an elevation on account of my solitary station.

I have some hesitation—to ask in this communication—for a pecuniary donation—from my paternal relation. Yet upon consideration and mature deliberation—I feel under obligation—to call for *said* donation—to an amount of ten dollars valuation. I hope your appreciation—of my firm determination to cease the rustic occupation of “*the wild oats*” cultivation—will give you inspiration to forward *said* donation, without hesitation, to its proper destination.

I now hasten to inform you without dissimulation that I make a declaration of each money dispensation of however small consideration—(no matter on what occasion) within a little book for your future observation, which will no doubt be a great gratification.

As I can give no further information—worthy of your investigation—I will close this desertation [*sic*]—thereby saving my epistolary reputation, from total condemnation in your estimation, so, with much obligation.

³ Morton to his father, October 12, 1850.

⁴ *Ibid.*

I remain yours till life's termination. J. Sterling, of the great Morton Nation.

P. S. "Note Bene"—Tell Mon. Riecles that with his excellent preparation & some application I shall have a French education before graduation. After which graduation I have some anticipation of taking a French relation, according to divine proclamation & the church organization. Sending him great congratulation—I make my final termination—with a special invitation to my maternal relation—for an immediate visitation to my habitation.—J. S. M., with a point of exclamation.⁵

It is not unlikely that the young student needed to keep prodding himself if he was to pursue his studies with any degree of regularity; for J. Sterling Morton was never one who could keep himself long at any plodding task. As his diary well indicates, solving algebraic equations or translating Latin and Greek were distasteful occupations. His ardent temperament and lively social habits demanded activity the results of which were more quickly evident.

One such activity was mischief, and the irrepressible youth continued to display at Ann Arbor the mischievousness which had characterized his course at Albion. His diary furnishes some evidence concerning the avenues into which this activity led. Upon one occasion he recorded: "Called before the Faculty in company with four others, to answer to the chg [*sic*] of having fastened the monitor in. Rather rich time—they have evidently woke up the wrong passengers."⁶

Many of his pranks centered around the bell which tolled the hours and by which the University schedule was maintained. Particularly obnoxious to the students was the early morning ringing which called them to begin the day by assembling in the chapel for prayers. To remedy the situation a "committee on acoustics" was formed among the undergraduates, and judging from the intimate account of its work contained in his diary, young Morton must have been an active member. They were diligent in their efforts to silence the bell, but seemingly were unsuccessful. The young prankster wrote in his journal: ". . . efforts . . . thus far have proved entirely futile. That ginging old bell will ring in spite of chains, padlocks or anything which the 'committee on acoustics' have as yet found."⁷ Even when someone got the idea of tipping the bell over and filling it with water which turned to ice during the cold

⁵ Morton to his parents, January 14, 1852.

⁶ Diary, March 10, 1852.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1850.

winter night, the janitor circumvented them, and promenaded the halls early the next morning with a large dinner bell in his hand.

Mischief, however, was by no means the only activity to which young Morton could give unstintingly of his energies. His inclination toward literature and politics had been observed in the Seminary, and this inclination was even more pronounced in the University. He read omnivorously and wrote a great deal, often to the neglect of his regular studies. His diary contains numerous entries such as: "Attended no recitations," "got excused from Gattin's Greek today"; but even more frequently there appear: "Read all day nearly, and wrote some," "Up till midnight preparing for debate," "Read until three a.m."

Professor D. D. Whedon, in whose home Morton stayed during his sophomore year, wrote of him: ". . . his ambition was rather literary than scholastic; he shone better in debate than in recitation & was more a universal reader than a laborious student. Hence, he was often remiss in his duties. . . . In fine he seemed to me to be one of that class of students who derive more benefit from the libraries and the literary associations than from the laboratory or the classroom."⁸

Professor Whedon described young Morton's literary ambition as "intense," and it probably was in literary pursuits that J. Sterling Morton expended his best efforts during his university years. He was a member of the Phi Phi Alpha literary and debating society, and was prominent in its debates which, according to the organization's bylaws, were held each Friday evening at seven o'clock. He often recorded in his journal that the proposition as he stated it had carried. He served as the organization's "critic," and the extra pages of his diary for the year 1852 are filled with lengthy criticisms of the various speakers.

For a time he was corresponding secretary of the Chi Psi fraternity, and appears to have been an active member of the organization all during his college career. His fraternal loyalties were particularly aroused when after a change in administration, the University officials sought to discourage secret societies. Morton never acquiesced in what he considered an invasion of his rights, and he became conspicuous as an opponent of the faculty and a champion of the rights of Greek-letter fraternities.

⁸ D. D. Whedon to J. D. Morton, July 3, 1854.

The most ambitious project of Morton's university career was the publication in his junior year, on his own initiative and resources, of *The Peninsular Quarterly and University Magazine*, a periodical which proposed to be a medium for the publication of "truly western literature," and the advocacy of "liberal principles."⁹

The magazine was the University of Michigan's first student publication. One of the few copies known to be in existence is bound with a group of miscellaneous pamphlets conserved by J. Sterling Morton.¹⁰ This is Number Two of Volume One, October, 1853. It contains 112 pages of text and eight of advertising, and of its twelve articles and stories all but two were written expressly for the magazine. The contributions ranged from such articles as a serious, documented discussion of "France—the Empire and the Emperor," to the rollicking story of "The Lives of Brown, Jones, and Robinson"; from rhyming doggerel entitled "Judah in Babylon," to a thoughtful article on the "Need of the Living Teacher." The editor maintained a column of miscellany under the title of "Chaos." Unfortunately, the column for October 1853, was virtually all contributed from outside sources.

The life of *The Peninsular Quarterly* was evidently short and struggling, the editor having greater literary than financial resources. References to the magazine appearing in the scanty correspondence preserved from the period are concerned with the writer's inability to get subscriptions. A young man named H. M. Cheever, who solicited advertisements, declared that it was difficult to interest businessmen in the publication: "You must remember you only have 4 issues & not a good advertising medium either."¹¹ Even had the magazine been a success financially, other events were to transpire which would have made its continued publication extremely unlikely—at least under the original editor.

On May 5, 1854, six weeks before he was to receive his degree, young Morton's academic career was cut short by a letter from the

⁹ Sam G. Smith to Morton, April 24, 1853. Letter quotes from the prospectus.

¹⁰ "First Student Paper Comes to Light," *Michigan Alumnus*, November 22, 1941, 141, states that copies of the magazine were found recently in Monroe, Michigan. The author has been unable to examine these copies.

¹¹ H. M. Cheever to Morton, October 3, 1853.

secretary of the faculty transmitting that body's resolution, "... that J. Sterling Morton on account of his general remissness and inattention to all his college duties, and particularly for long continued neglect of recitation, and for his manifest contempt of the authorities of the University be hereby removed from the privileges of the University."¹²

It would seem at first blush that those absences from class, locked-in monitors, and padlocked bells had, upon the eve of his graduation, caught up with their perpetrator. Then, too, young Morton may have been a bit too vociferous in his defense of fraternities. There was, however, much more to the difficulty than the disciplining of a student who had failed to appreciate the seriousness of University custom and procedure. Morton's expulsion was part of an episode whose reverberations were felt throughout the State of Michigan.

On the morning of May 4, the day before Morton was expelled, it was announced that the Board of Regents had dismissed Dr. J. Adams Allen, head of the medical department of the University, and one of the most popular members of the faculty.¹³ The action met with immediate popular disapproval, and served as excellent fuel for the flame of resentment which had been glowing for some time against the President of the University, Dr. Henry Philip Tappan. Dr. Tappan had assumed the presidency in 1852 and almost from the beginning had alienated powerful individuals in the state, prominent among them Wilbur F. Storey, the brilliant editor and publisher of the *Detroit Free Press*.¹⁴

Dr. Tappan was a great admirer of the Prussian universities, and attempted to pattern Michigan after their model.¹⁵ He styled himself "Chancellor," rather than "President," and the first catalogue issued under his supervision stated specifically that education in

¹² A. Winchell, secretary of the faculty, to Morton, May 5, 1854.

¹³ *Detroit Free Press*, May 7, 1854. Dr. Allen was a magnetic and colorful man. He was an eclectic in medicine and this aroused the antagonism of the regular School. He lectured on art, history and literature, had also been taken up by the politicians and was groomed as a candidate for Mayor. He was later lecturer and President of Rush Medical College.

¹⁴ Perry, "The Newspaper Attack on Dr. Tappan," *Michigan History Magazine*, X (October 1926), 503, 508.

¹⁵ Perry, "Dr. Tappan Comes to Michigan," *loc. cit.*

Michigan was to be "copied after the Prussian, acknowledged to be the most perfect in the world."¹⁶ Whatever the inclination of the American West, it was not Prussian; and it was this quality in Dr. Tappan which provoked the greatest criticism. Storey wrote at one time that Tappan seemed "to be in danger of forgetting that Michigan is not Prussia, and Ann Arbor not Berlin."¹⁷

Dr. Allen's removal was looked upon as an ominous example of the new President's "Prussianism,"¹⁸ and on the evening of May 4, the day the dismissal was announced, the citizens of Ann Arbor held a mass meeting as a part of the public protest against the action of the University officials. Under the chairmanship of Judge Caleb Clark, the group passed a formal resolution protesting Dr. Allen's discharge. Before the passage of the resolution various persons present at the meeting spoke at length on the question. One of the speakers was J. Sterling Morton, who, according to one report, came to the platform "after being repeatedly called out by the students and citizens."¹⁹ Dr. Allen was *Chi Psi* (Middlebury College, 1845), and Morton had developed a great admiration and friendship for him. It is doubtful that much coaxing was required to persuade the hot-tempered youth to express himself on behalf of a friend whom he thought unjustly injured.

Just what he said upon that occasion is not known, but judging from reports he conducted himself with remarkable calmness and probity. Judge Clark writing to the boy's father said that he made no disparaging remarks in reference either to Dr. Tappan or the faculty: "Knowing his friendship for Dr. Allen, I feared when he was called upon to speak that his enthusiasm might get the advantage of his judgment and that he might act and speak imprudently. I was most agreeably disappointed. He was calm and dispassionate & used no invectives, except towards the actors of the infamy which he did not name."²⁰

It is probable, however, that he made it abundantly clear, if only

¹⁶ *Catalogue of the Corporative Officers and Students in the Departments of Medicine, Arts and Sciences in the University of Michigan, 1852-53* (Detroit, 1853), 19.

¹⁷ *Detroit Free Press*, December 28, 1853.

¹⁸ Perry, "The Newspaper Attack on Dr. Tappan," *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ *Detroit Free Press*, May 7, 1854.

²⁰ Caleb Clark to J. D. Morton, July 3, 1854.

by inference, who the "actors of the infamy" were. In any event, it was on the morning after this speech that the faculty had occasion to call to mind his former malfeasances and to decide that they merited expulsion.

Morton's removal precipitated a storm of protest among the students. A communication, signed "One of the Students," appeared in the *Detroit Free Press* violently attacking the action of the faculty for the gross injustice to Morton, "a worthy student friend, one who, by his kindness of disposition and urbanity of manners, has endeared himself to a band of students, and who, for his rare talents and gentlemanly deportment, has learnt to be welcomed by a host of citizens."²¹

Newspapers about the state began to take notice of the trouble. Storey complained in the *Free Press*: "The rottenness in Denmark is beginning to smell in the nostrils of the people. Is it not a burning shame that the University, which, eighteen months ago, started with the fairest prospects, should so soon be sunk so low?"²² The *Lansing Journal* praised Morton's talents and declared that no satisfactory reason had been given for his removal.²³

Dr. Pitcher, of Detroit, and former Lieutenant Governor O. D. Richardson, of Pontiac, were sent for by some of the faculty to try to allay the storm raging among the students, their own sons, Nat Pitcher and Lyman Richardson, being particularly included.

The sentiment among the faculty was that if Morton would just say something—make some concession—he would be restored in good standing to the privileges of the University. Although Morton characteristically refused to retract a single statement, he did, at the request of Governor Richardson, have a conference with President Tappan. At the close of this meeting Morton signed a statement in which, according to his version, he admitted that *if* the charges in the resolution of removal were correct, then the removal was just; and that if he had committed faults, he sincerely regretted them.²⁴

²¹ May 11, 1854.

²² May 16, 1854.

²³ Reprinted in the *Detroit Free Press*, May 13, 1854.

²⁴ *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 1854. O. D. Richardson moved to Nebraska in 1854, and was a member of the first territorial legislature. Lyman Richardson also moved to Nebraska, where he remained for many years a close friend of J. Sterling Morton.

On the basis of this affirmation Morton was admitted again to the privileges of the University.²⁵ He was not destined, however, to enjoy those privileges for long.

Whether willfully or not, Dr. Tappan made public a statement purporting to be the one on which Morton was reinstated which differed greatly from the statement as it originally was written. The original declaration, asserting that only *if* the charges were correct was the removal just, was changed to read: "I . . . acknowledge the justice of the action of the faculty in removing me from the university on the grounds assigned . . . I sincerely regret the faults I have committed and promise if restored to my class and former standing to observe faithfully henceforth all the laws of the institution."²⁶

Such an expression, of course, was a complete denial of Morton's former position. When the garbled version of his statement was made public, Morton sat down and wrote a blistering letter to the *Free Press*, reviewing the whole affair, and in a style that is precursory of the brilliant invective he was to use against opponents in later years, declared that he had signed the original statement only because of the insistence of his friends, "and not because of my avidity for a paltry piece of 'sheepskin' adorned by names which God forbid I should ever be guilty of respecting."

He insisted further that he wanted to correct the report, "that I had acknowledged I had no right of *free speech*, and that I had meanly petitioned, implored and besought the Faculty for mercy, for *six weeks longer sojourn at the feet of Gamaliel, and the Latin-scratched integument of a dead sheep*. . . . I am not the *crawling* kind, and I have recalled from the faculty the paper I signed and informed them that I will remain a 'removed student' rather than have it understood that I had skulked back into the fold."²⁷

After such an outburst, the faculty could do nothing but re-expel the young man; and this they did on May 19, taking pains to observe that the recalcitrant student had failed to attend any classes since his reinstatement.²⁸

Though he was not allowed to graduate with his class, Morton

²⁵ L. Fasquelle, Secretary Pro tem of the faculty, to J. D. Morton, May 10, 1854.

²⁶ Statement appeared in the *Detroit Enquirer*, May 15, 1854: is quoted here from letter written by A. Winchell to J. D. Morton, June 12, 1854.

²⁷ *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 1854.

²⁸ Winchell to J. D. Morton, June 12, 1854.

was not altogether barred from the ranks of bachelors of arts; for in 1856 he was granted an honorary Bachelor of Arts degree by Union College in Schenectady, New York.²⁹ Ironically, Union College was President Tappan's own alma mater, and he had been one of the students in whom Dr. Eliphalet Nott, President of Union, had taken special pride.³⁰

Just how Morton happened to receive the degree is not completely clear. Prior to its conferment in 1856, his application had been denied, even though presented by Bishop Alonzo Potter, one of the most distinguished members of the faculty. It has been suggested that Dr. Tappan might have asked President Nott or a Union trustee to grant the degree, because he felt that the University of Michigan had not been quite fair to Morton.³¹ This seems all the more probable in view of the action of the University of Michigan in September 1858, by which the faculty adopted a remission of expulsion and granted the usual diploma.³²

Morton did not spend much time worrying about the problem of academic honors. Immediately after his final expulsion he went to Detroit, to which place his parents had moved in 1853, and got a job as a reporter for the *Free Press*.³³ On this paper he received the same kind of journalistic training he had got as a youngster in his Uncle Edward's newspaper office. Wilbur F. Storey was independent in the extreme, and for all opinions other than his own, with the possible exception of those of Lewis Cass for whom he had a real admiration, Mr. Storey seemed to have a supreme contempt. Storey also had vigorous opinions regarding the province of the journalist. He frequently declared to his staff: "The function of a newspaper is to print the news, and raise hell."³⁴

²⁹ Minutes of the Trustees, Union College, 1856.

³⁰ Perry, "Formative Influences in the Early Life of Henry Philip Tappan," *Michigan History Magazine*, X (January 1926), 14.

³¹ C. N. Waldron, Secretary of the Graduate Council, Union College, to N. C. Abbott, April 21, 1838.

³² Abbott, Manuscript on J. Sterling Morton's Youth, 25.

³³ Morton to his mother, April 22, 1859. One of his first assignments was to report the early Republican Convention held at Jackson, Michigan, in June 1854.

³⁴ Catlin, "Little Journeys in Journalism—Wilbur F. Storey," *Michigan History Magazine*, X (October 1926), 521-522.

Doubtless young Morton found such an atmosphere congenial and instructive, though he did not remain long as a newspaper reporter.

During the early months of 1854, and for some time previous, there had been much excitement over the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. After the bill became a law in May, the settlement of the territories thus created was watched with avid interest as the newest theatre of the mighty struggle between slavery and freedom. Kansas was viewed with more concern than was Nebraska, for it was felt that the latter territory was too far north to support a slave economy. Nebraska was almost forgotten in the rush of Northerners, bearing "Beecher's Bibles," to Kansas, and their bloody engagements with Southerners who sought to extend slavery into the new territory. Nevertheless, there was some settlement in Nebraska—along the Missouri and up the Platte—and there was considerable opinion that the territory might someday become a great state. At least, such was the opinion of two young Democrats in Detroit, Andrew J. Poppleton and J. Sterling Morton. Morton reported in later life, that one summer afternoon as they were walking along the shady streets of the city, talking of the new territory and dreaming of their futures, they decided to seek their fortunes in Nebraska. Poppleton said that he would go first and write back regarding the prospects. He went, and soon a letter came back praising Nebraska and urging Morton to join him.³⁵ Others also urged the young man to seek his future in the new country. Wilbur F. Storey had supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and was interested in the territory. Lewis Cass, by this time United States Senator from Michigan and Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee,³⁶ urged his youthful friend to go to Nebraska.³⁷

It took but little encouragement to convince young Morton that his future lay in the new territory. For several years he had been possessed of an ambition to go West. This ambition had been particularly strong during the gold rush of forty-nine, and at that time

³⁵ Unidentified clipping reporting a speech by J. Sterling Morton. Morton Scrapbooks. Poppleton and Morton occasionally disagreed politically during the long years they spent in Nebraska but always they were friends. Poppleton was active in the Democratic party, and became one of Omaha's most distinguished attorneys. Morton's oldest son, Joy Morton, married Caroline Lake, whose mother, Ladda Poppleton Lake, was A. J. Poppleton's niece.

³⁶ *Michigan Biographies*, I:156.

³⁷ Mark Morton, in conversation with the author, May 4, 1940.

his parents had difficulty in convincing him that his fortune could be better secured in the University of Michigan than in the gold fields of California.

J. Sterling Morton's parents were not at all enthusiastic about this new project. They reasoned, and not without right, that their son should remain in Detroit and take advantage of his opportunities there. J. D. Morton had become prominent in the affairs of the city, having recently been appointed General Agent of the New York Central Railroad, and President of the Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank; and Sterling himself had already attracted favorable attention from some of the city's leading citizens.

Young Morton, however, was of a family of pioneers. His father and grandfather had both ventured into new and unsettled regions in their youth. It is not strange that he should have desired to do likewise. Possibly this had some effect upon paternal thinking, for his parents finally agreed, though with little enthusiasm, that their son should begin adult life in Nebraska.³⁸

In addition to his parents, Morton persuaded another person to accept his proposed migration. This was Caroline, the girl to whom he had been engaged since the age of fifteen and who for four years had been at school in Utica, New York. She not only consented to his going, but agreed to go with him, and on October 30, 1854, the day of their marriage, Caroline and J. Sterling Morton started for Nebraska.³⁹

³⁸ J. D. Morton to Morton, February 21, 1855.

³⁹ It is reported in the *Reminiscences and Proceedings* of the Nebraska Territorial Pioneers' Association (Lincoln, 1923), II:67, that the Mortons eloped to get married because they could not obtain parental consent. This is incorrect. They were married at the residence of David French, Caroline's foster father, at the corner of Congress and Brush streets, Detroit, by the Reverend Joshua Cooke, pastor of the Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church.

J. Sterling Morton

Arbuckle Lodge Nebraska City
Nebraska

Note: It was a practice of J. Sterling Morton to inscribe his name on the margin of page 32 in books of his possession which he especially valued. A characteristic sample of this habit is shown here.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

"AN IMPORTANT ACQUISITION"

A JOURNEY TO NEBRASKA in 1854 was slow, painful, and tedious. The railroad had not yet spanned the Mississippi, and the traveller from the northern states had to choose between overland transportation of various and uncertain types across Iowa, or follow the roundabout route of the rivers, by way of St. Louis.

Caroline and Sterling chose the river route. Just how they reached St. Louis is uncertain, but in all probability they went from Detroit to Chicago via the Michigan Central Railroad, whose general agent at Detroit was the groom's father, then took the Chicago and Alton Route to St. Louis where they took passage on a Missouri River packet.

The river steamers of the Fifties formed a picturesque link between Eastern cultivation and the vast, unsettled expanse of the Western prairies. Every aspect of life was exhibited on the boats as they churned their way against the thick, brown current of the Missouri. There were merchants and planters, missionaries and gamblers, young married couples, and older married men who had left their families behind while they came to spy out the land. Usually the boats were full. Often they carried four hundred emigrants on one trip, and sometimes more than five hundred,¹ discharging them at St. Joseph, Brownville, Nebraska City, Bellevue, Omaha, and points still farther north, whence they struck overland

¹ Everett Dick, *The Sod House Frontier* (New York, 1937), 6-7.

to claim new homes in the West. One traveller reported: "On our crowded steamer every stateroom is filled, and nightly the cabin floor is covered with sleepers upon mattresses. . . ." ²

In what was probably the first letter written by either of the Mortons after their departure from home, Caroline described their journey to Nebraska:

We had a delightful trip up the river from St. Louis. We left that place two weeks ago tonight and was five days on the river. The boat was comfortable . . . only it was too crowded. The *majority were minors* from one to five and eight years of age—darling little creatures only their faces were so dirty I could not kiss them. There were several colored slaves on board—cabin passengers, some had children and it was difficult to tell the whites from the blacks. There was a gentleman and lady got onto the boat the day before we landed that had with them four or five slaves, and one little boy that they petted and caressed as any fond mother would her own child. Sterling asked him if he would not go to Nebraska with him—he said no, no, Massa could never find him if he should. At every little place we stopped at while riding through Missouri in the stage we would see more or less slaves. They seem to be perfectly happy, laughing and joking and appear a great deal more independent and at home than our white servants. I do not think however that Nebraska will ever hold many slaves. . . . ³

The Missouri was low in the fall of 1854, and their boat was unable to go up the river farther than St. Joseph. So the young emigrants completed their journey by stagecoach. They went up the Iowa side of the river to Saint Marys, where because of the high winds they had to wait several days before being ferried across to Nebraska.

St. Marys, which has long since passed out of existence, was for a few years an important "jumping off" place for emigrants. It was a few miles south of Council Bluffs, and had been started in 1852 by Peter Sarpy, noted Nebraska Indian trader living at Bellevue. He had chosen the site when looking for a place to re-establish his ferry business after the landing on the Iowa side across from Bellevue had been flooded. After moving his steam ferry (the first on the upper Missouri) to the new location, he erected a store and opened an emigrant outfitting business. A hotel, the *Iowa House*, was erected the same year. ⁴

² Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi* (Hartford, Connecticut, 1867), 24.

³ Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, November 18, 1854.

⁴ C. Chaucer Goss, *Bellevue, Larimer and Saint Mary, Their History, Location, Description and Advantages* (Bellevue, 1859), 30–31.

From the bluffs of St. Marys, Nebraska-bound travellers could look across the muddy river to the rolling hills on the western side, and, beyond the hills, could see the plains of the Great West stretching far into the haze. Caroline Morton wrote enthusiastically to her sister-in-law: "I am very much pleased with this country, especially *our* side of the river. The scenery is beautiful and as soon as I can I hope to have my easel, canvas and pallet of paints to make some sketches of the magnificent bluffs which surround us." ⁵

Though his destination had been just "Nebraska" when he left Detroit, either on the trip or soon after his arrival in St. Marys, Morton decided to settle in Bellevue. The location seemed by far the best in the new territory.

Bellevue was the oldest permanent white settlement in Nebraska. According to tradition it had received its name from Manuel Lisa, who passed up the river as early as 1807. The American Fur Company is said to have established a trading post there three years later; and in 1827, with the abandonment of Fort Atkinson, Bellevue became the chief post of the Missouri River country, the principal shipping port and trading point. As long as Nebraska remained Indian territory, Bellevue could be nothing more than a trading post; but when the territory was opened for settlement, ambitious plans were laid to expand it into the "Queen City of the West." Peter Sarpy and various of his friends had even anticipated the Kansas-Nebraska Act and had organized a town company on February 9, 1854.⁶ As soon as Congress gave the signal for settlement, these men began the feverish task of building a city overnight. With the optimism that possessed all town-builders on the Great Plains, they were sanguine of success.

Less than two months after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Bellevue's newspaper, *The Nebraska Palladium* (still published across the river in Iowa), reviewed triumphantly the progress already made: "Within the last month a large city upon a grand scale has been laid out, with a view to the location of the capital of Nebraska, at this point, and with a view to making it the centre of commerce,

⁵ Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, *loc. cit.*

⁶ Federal Writers Project, *Old Bellevue* (Papillion, Nebraska, 1937), 6.

and the half-way house between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
...”⁷

As soon as they could arrange for living quarters and get across the river, Sterling and Caroline established themselves in Bellevue. Under “Arrivals”—an important column in the early Western papers—the *Palladium* noted:

J. S. Morton. This gentleman, formerly Associate Editor of the Detroit Free Press, and lady, arrived at Bellevue, on the 30th ult., where they intend to settle. Mr. Morton is a young man of ability and a popular writer, and having had the good sense to select one of the most strongly fortified points—in a political view—he will no doubt be an important acquisition to the Territory, and to the Community.⁸

In spite of the town’s pretensions to greatness, the best it could offer the young couple was a log cabin, though one larger and more commodious than most log houses. It was a two-story structure, with a kitchen, dining room-parlor, and bedroom on the first floor, and on the second floor an extra bedroom, the hospitality of which, after the custom of the early West, was frequently extended to a traveller or a new arrival in the community. It was occupied most of the time during that first winter, for accommodations were scarce in Bellevue. From the outside there was nothing which particularly distinguished the cabin from a number of others in the settlement, but the interior was considered to be luxuriously furnished. The walls of the bedroom were covered with buffalo robes which Peter Sarpy had purchased from the Indians at two dollars each.⁹ The cabin stood upon a bluff just above the place where the Missouri sweeps in a wide curve about the southeastern edge of the village. On the river bank below the bluff the Omaha Indians had their buffalo-skin tepees. They were the nearest neighbors.¹⁰

That first winter in Nebraska was exceedingly balmy. Indian

⁷ July 15, 1854.

⁸ December 6, 1854. The statement regarding Morton’s connection with the *Free Press* was not entirely correct. Mr. Morton, in pasting this issue of the paper—the first incidentally, of the *Palladium* actually printed in Nebraska—in a scrap-book many years later, when he had had long and bitter experience with the press of Nebraska, wrote at the side: “This notice is the first ever given me in Nebraska and it is not truthful.”

⁹ John Q. Goss, “Bellevue, Its Past and Present,” *Proceedings and Collections*, Nebraska State Historical Society (Second Series), II:43.

¹⁰ “Mrs. Caroline Joy Morton,” *Transactions and Reports*, Nebraska State Historical Society, I:120.

Summer lasted well into December, and Morton recalled in later years that on January 1, 1855, he had gone hunting in his shirt sleeves. He remembered it clearly because he sat upon a log near the mouth of Papillion Creek, "and wondered why people came West and when others would be along in sufficient numbers to make a village, a city, a county, and a state."¹¹

Morton had a wealth of activity to occupy him while in Bellevue, but this first winter in Nebraska must have been a strange, and sometimes terrifying experience for the girl of twenty who was his bride. She had been reared in security and comfort, and educated to all the refinements of the East. Now she found herself in a log cabin on the Missouri River, with a few Indians as her nearest neighbors!

Caroline Morton, however, was equal to the task before her, and like many another bride who made her first home on the great plains west of the Missouri, she assumed the duties of her household with a gay heart and boundless hope. Her Indian neighbors found that she was generous and kind and often they received the delicacies of a white kitchen from her hand. She insisted, however, upon adding her quota to their education by obliging them to use the knife and fork which she always placed with the plate set for them.¹²

Then, too, Caroline Morton's lot was not quite so hard as that of those women whose husbands took them out beyond the river counties and built lonely little soddies for their families. Those women often spent months on the treeless plain without seeing another of their sex. Although there were less than a dozen houses in Bellevue during the winter of 1854-55,¹³ Caroline Morton had several very pleasant women friends. Mrs. Fenner Ferguson, wife of the first chief justice of the territory, lived on a claim next to the Morton's, and was the closest white neighbor. Association with Mrs. Ferguson was reminiscent of home, too, for she was an Albion girl. In addition to Mrs. Ferguson, there were four or five other white women in the settlement, including Mrs. William Hamilton, the

¹¹ Morton to John Q. Goss, Bellevue, November 19, 1895.

¹² Harriett S. McMurphy, "Nebraska Women in 1855," *Proceedings and Collections*, Nebraska State Historical Society (Second Series), II:167.

¹³ Josephine Mary Jelen, "Towns and Townsites in Territorial Nebraska" (Ms. in University of Nebraska Library), 40.

Presbyterian missionary's wife, whom Caroline found to be, "a good lady." ¹⁴

The problem of provisioning a household was always a serious one for the pioneer. Caroline, however, did not appear to be at all fearful about obtaining food with which to set her table. She wrote to Emma Morton: "There is plenty of good beef, venison, and wild game, vegetables of all kinds, and two or three stores where they keep all kinds of eatables, drinkables and wearables—even oysters put up in cans, pickles and preserves can be procured." ¹⁵

Peter Sarpy advertised that his store had for sale "a large assortment of merchandise adapted to the wants of all in the new and thriving community." As to articles for human consumption this included: "Crushed, clarified, loaf and brown sugar, molasses, syrup molasses, golden syrup, superior tea, Rio and Java coffee, sassafras, ginger, nutmegs, snuffs, tobacco, cigars, vinegar, pickles, pepper sauce . . . medicines for fevers, fever and ague, and the common complaints of the country." ¹⁶

Notwithstanding such an array of delicacies, by the time spring had arrived Morton with familiar facetiousness could write his sister: "Our diet is rather plain at present being made up of bread & pork & pork & bread." ¹⁷

Like many of his contemporaries, Morton had come west for the express purpose of achieving fame or wealth, preferably both; and, being present at the very birth of civil government in the territory, perhaps it was only natural that he should feel that in politics lay his best chance of success. He plunged into the turbulent political life of the territory with all the vigor of his twenty-two years. Before he had been a week in Nebraska he had attended two political meetings and had made a political speech. ¹⁸

The haste with which young Morton assumed political activity was not exceptional. As in new communities generally, most of the settlers were young, and being young, impatient. Many who came were attracted by the political opportunities and the hope that some day they would be powerful figures in a great state. They lost no

¹⁴ Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, *loc. cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Nebraska Palladium*, December 6, 1854.

¹⁷ Morton to Emma Morton, March 11, 1855.

¹⁸ Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, *loc. cit.*

time in beginning their careers. The same issue of the *Nebraska Palladium*, for example, that reported the arrival of Silas Strickland from Tennessee, carried a notice that he was announcing his candidacy for election to the House of Representatives in the territorial legislature.¹⁹

The first great question to agitate these youthful politicians was the location of the territorial capital. It was an important question. Given the capital, any settlement no matter how poorly located might develop into a city; denied the capital, the most favorable location would be seriously handicapped.

Bellevue seemed the logical and indeed, for a time, the only possible choice. Secure in this comforting condition, her citizens eagerly awaited the arrival of Francis Burt, of South Carolina, whom President Pierce had appointed to be the first governor of Nebraska. When the Governor did arrive he was so exhausted from the trip that he immediately went to bed in the Presbyterian Mission, unable even to attend the reception which the citizens had planned for him.

Before his appointment Burt had been Third Auditor in the Treasury Department. He had not been well in Washington, and it was hoped that the change would improve his condition. It did just the opposite. He became ill at St. Louis and was in bed there for several days. In his weakened condition, the trip thence to Bellevue by river boat, stagecoach, and prairie wagon proved to be more than he could stand. He never arose from his bed in the Reverend Mr. Hamilton's mission house.²⁰

The death of Governor Burt threw a cloud of doubt and uncertainty over the political future of the territory. It had been generally conceded that he would make Bellevue the permanent territorial capital.²¹ The secretary of the territory, Thomas B. Cuming, who upon Burt's death assumed the position of Acting Governor, had no such fixed ideas.

Cuming was only thirty when he arrived in Nebraska. Prior to his appointment as secretary, he had been editor of a Democratic

¹⁹ December 6, 1854.

²⁰ Clyde B. Aitchison, "The Life of Governor Burt," *Proceedings and Collections*, Nebraska State Historical Society (Second Series), I:34.

²¹ J. Sterling Morton, "Early Times and Pioneers," *Transactions and Reports*, Nebraska State Historical Society (First Series), III:102.

weekly in Keokuk, Iowa, the *Dispatch*. He was the son of a Protestant Episcopal minister, and a graduate of the University of Michigan, though of an earlier student generation than Morton. He was a swarthy, compactly built man, about five feet, eight inches in height, with hair as straight and black as that of an Indian, and snapping black eyes which flashed energy and determination.²² He was deeply concerned with his own political advancement, and was not to be bound by commitments, real or fancied, made by his predecessor. He was open to suggestions, from wherever they might come. And of suggestions, the Acting Governor received a great plenty.

Every settlement in the territory fancied itself the ideal location for the territorial capital. The only serious contender for the honor in addition to Bellevue, however, was Omaha, about ten miles to the north. The pretensions of this place were looked upon as definitely upstart by the citizens of Bellevue; for while there had been some sort of a settlement at Bellevue since the Eighteen-thirties, there was not a single cabin at Omaha before July 4, 1854. On that day a party got together in Council Bluffs, crossed the river and erected a log cabin on the townsite, though they were unable to get the roof on it. Omaha was the creature of a Council Bluffs ferry company. The proprietors laid out the town, and then offered various inducements for people to settle there. On September 1, 1854, they were offering to give away lots to those who would improve them. They also thought to get the capital, as they were erecting a building, "suitable for the territorial legislature."²³ As events were to show, the ferry company was not acting unwisely in providing for the accommodation of the territorial government.

Acting Governor Cuming spent much time at Council Bluffs—altogether too much the partisans of Bellevue thought—and there was great fear that he was being unduly influenced in favor of Omaha. Hence, on December 9, the citizens of Bellevue held a mass meeting to further their cause and invited Governor Cuming to be present. This gathering turned into an indignation meeting. Cum-

²² J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1913), I:172. This was a subscription history of which Morton was the editor. It was not published until after his death, and the work was Watkins' rather than his. Subsequent references will be simply, "Morton-Watkins."

²³ Alfred Sorenson, *History of Omaha* (Omaha, 1889), 52-53.

ing, addressing the group, declared that he had made up his mind two weeks earlier to locate the capital at Omaha, but owing to improper attempts to influence him in favor of that place he had changed his mind and was now in doubt. He urged his audience to support him, and promised that if Bellevue would nominate a candidate for the Council and two for the House pledged to sustain his administration and not to attempt to remove the capital from the place of his selection, he would give Bellevue a district by itself; otherwise it would be included in the Omaha district.²⁴

At this point, A. W. Hollister, one of the town's many candidates for a place in the First Territorial Legislature, arose in a vigorous denunciation of Governor Cuming for a highly compromising letter which he was supposed to have written to a Mr. Gray. Cuming had earlier declared the letter to be a forgery, and when Mr. Hollister mentioned it, the Acting Governor swore that he had not come to the meeting to listen to personal attacks and angrily stalked from the room.²⁵

The *Palladium* printed the letter in full, "as a mournful duty." Excerpts from it read:

. . . I never forget my friends, and furthermore, have always succeeded thus far, in my efforts to serve them. The Capitol (this is strictly confidential) will be located if I control it, at Omaha City, and there is every prospect that it will be the greatest city in the west between the Mississippi and California. . . .

I have made the proprietors of the town deed some extra lots to my friends. . . .

In a few days, I shall have the pleasure of sending you the papers, putting you in possession of an interest of the Capitol, worth now from \$3,000 to \$5,000, and of an indefinite value hereafter—after the location. This will be a gratuity from the proprietors of the town. . . .²⁶

That a man of Cuming's political sagacity would be so naive as to write in such a fashion is more than doubtful. Nevertheless, the genuineness of the letter had been vouched for by Major Hepner, United States Indian Agent, who offered to swear to the same in a court of justice;²⁷ and whether genuine or not, the people of Bellevue were ready to accept it as overwhelming evidence of the Acting Governor's duplicity.

²⁴ Morton-Watkins, I:182.

²⁵ Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People* (Chicago, 1931), I:252.

²⁶ December 13, 1854.

²⁷ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I:252.

Bellevue's fears were realized on December 20, when Governor Cuming announced that the First Territorial Legislature would convene at Omaha.²⁸ He had issued an earlier proclamation authorizing the election of councilmen and representatives. In this he had divided the territory into eight counties, four north, and four south of the Platte River. The four counties north of the Platte had been assigned a total of seven councilmen and fourteen representatives, and the four counties south of the river, a total of six councilmen and twelve representatives. This arrangement gave the northern counties a majority in both houses, though by the first census the southern region was shown to have nearly twice as many settlers as the northern, the count being 1,818 to 914.²⁹

Nebraska is split naturally into two sections by the Platte River which sprawls like a huge snake across the state. It was too wide and shallow for ferries, the sandy bottom was too soft to admit of good fords, and during territorial times the people were too poor to build bridges. Governor Cuming, by gerrymandering the territory in favor of the North Platte region intensified the sectional feeling that already existed, and what began as merely a local fight between Bellevue and Omaha grew to proportions that engulfed the whole territory. Bellevue, though a few miles north of the Platte, was thrown with the South Platte faction by the Governor's action in locating the capital.

Mass meetings were held at many places in the South Platte region for the purpose of denouncing Governor Cuming. The residents of Pierce County,³⁰ meeting at Nebraska City, passed resolutions declaring that Governor Cuming was "no longer worthy or capable of discharging the duties that have accidentally devolved upon him, and his longer continuance in office would be an insult to the people of the Territory." They invited the citizens to meet in delegate convention at Nebraska City, "to select some suitable person to recommend to the President of the United States for appointment to the governorship" of the territory.³¹

At this meeting the four counties south of the Platte, and Bellevue,

²⁸ Morton-Watkins, I:182.

²⁹ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I:250.

³⁰ Renamed Otoe County.

³¹ Morton-Watkins, I:184.

were represented by nineteen delegates. Representing Bellevue were Stephen Decatur, George W. Hollister, and J. Sterling Morton.

Though Morton had been in the territory less than six weeks, he was already taking a position of leadership. He was appointed to the chairmanship of the committee on resolutions. The twenty-two year old politician did not let pass this opportunity to attack the Acting Governor—in whom he recognized a serious threat to his own political future—with all the vigor that could possibly be packed into a series of resolutions. His statement, adopted "after a long and spirited discussion," left little to be said:

Whereas, we believe that, in order to attain the ends of just government, the executive power should be vested in upright and honorable men; and whereas, we believe that power, when confided to unprincipled knaves, who seek rather to control than consult the people (whom we recognize as the only true American sovereigns) is always used to the advantage of the few and the oppression of the many, therefore,

Resolved, 1st That Acting Governor Cuming is neither an upright, honest nor honorable man.

Resolved, 2nd, That he, the aforesaid Acting Governor Cuming, is an unprincipled knave, and that he seeks rather to control than consult the people.

Resolved, 3d, That he the said Acting Governor has, by his own acts, secret ones now exposed, as well as those which he has openly avowed, convinced us of the truth of, and invited us to pass the above resolutions.

Resolved, 4th, That, recognizing the right of petition as the prerogative of all free citizens of the United States, we do hereby petition His Excellency, Franklin Pierce, President of the United States, to immediately remove the said Cuming from the acting governorship.

Resolved, 5th, That, we, also, because of the reasons hereinbefore stated, petition for his removal from the secretaryship of this territory. . . . ³²

Whatever the weight of these meetings and resolutions, President Pierce did appoint a new governor, Mark W. Izard, of Arkansas. At a meeting held in Bellevue in anticipation of Governor Izard's arrival, Morton continued his fight against Cuming and turned the occasion, in part at least, into a repudiation of the Acting Governor. When, as was the custom in territorial political gatherings, the meeting was closed with the adoption of resolutions, Morton and one or two others successfully advocated the addition of the following: "That as T. B. Cuming has never taken the oath qualifying him for the office of governor, none of his acts are legal, but null and void."

³² *Nebraska Palladium*, January 3, 1855.

Morton argued that Cuming's oath as secretary did not qualify him to perform the functions of governor; and as precedent pointed to the deaths of Presidents Harrison and Taylor, declaring that the vice presidents, before they served in their steads, were required to take a new oath as president, even though they had previously taken one as vice president.³³

Of course if they could have had Cuming's acts declared illegal, the residents of Bellevue would have been able to make a new bid for the capital. Such legalistic pulling and hauling, however, was to prove of no avail; and on January 16, 1855, the First Territorial Legislature convened in Omaha in accordance with Acting Governor Cuming's proclamation. Bellevue precinct sent three men whom they had chosen to be their representatives in the Douglas County delegation: A. W. Hollister as councilman; J. Sterling Morton and Stephen Decatur as representatives. Of the ninety-three votes cast in the precinct, Morton received ninety-one. His role as spearhead of the fight against Cuming and the "Omaha crowd" evidently was well recognized by his fellow townsmen. Of this first election held in Bellevue, the *Palladium* thought it "worthy of remark, that no intoxicating liquor was made use of, and nothing occurred unworthy of the place,"³⁴ the implication being that the same could not be said of certain other communities that were seeking the territorial capital.

When the three men from Bellevue arrived at the legislative hall, they found themselves denied admittance. The Acting Governor—still in charge because Governor Izard had not yet arrived in the territory—in certificating the members of the assembly had refused to recognize the Bellevue claimants.³⁵

Morton, not to be denied, gave notice that he intended to contest the seat of Mr. Clancy, one of the men who had been seated from Douglas County.³⁶ Stephen Decatur filed notice of contest against A. J. Poppleton, Morton's boyhood chum, who had been elected from Omaha. Charges of nonresidence were brought against the seated members, but with a population as shifting and impermanent

³³ *Ibid.*, January 10, 1855.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, December 13, 1854.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, February 7, 1855.

³⁶ *House Journal*, First Session, 17.

as that of early Nebraska, such a charge could have but little meaning. Indeed, in order to distinguish the various members of the first legislature, they were referred to as "from Iowa," "from Michigan," or from some other place outside the territory. The contestants could not prosecute their case successfully on such a basis, and none of those whom the Governor had certified lost their seats.

The *Palladium* complained bitterly over this turn of events. Cuming, it claimed, had denied ninety-three men in Bellevue representation when he allowed four councilmen and eight representatives, not to Douglas County, but to Omaha and Council Bluffs. A much larger number of votes had been cast in Omaha than in Bellevue, but the editor charged that "hordes" of men had been imported from Council Bluffs on election day so that Omaha's vote would overshadow that of Bellevue. At the same time that Cuming was denying the men of Bellevue representation, he established Burt County, "with not a half a dozen actual residents in it," giving it one member of the Council and two in the House.³⁷

The action of Governor Cuming was declared to be a complete denial of popular sovereignty, the basis of government in the Territory of Nebraska:

The doctrine of popular sovereignty is a good doctrine, our faith is in it, and we had expected that here in its new home, it would be developed properly, and by its benign influence, put down the cant and hypocrisy which has ever opposed it. But our hopes have thus far proved futile. And though the world abroad may envy us our privileges, it cannot know, and if it could, is too incredulous to believe, that by a conspiracy, headed by one rascal, those privileges and rights have been snatched from us. . . .

We complain because Douglas County as bounded and described by the proclamation, is deprived of all representation. We chose three honest men and capable ones too. . . . We sent them to the legislature to represent us . . . but they were too honest for the purpose of our corrupt Executive and his base and unworthy hirelings, and are therefore not admitted.³⁸

Regardless of the right or wrong connected with the case, Bellevue's hopes of greatness were shattered. The legislature approved Governor Cuming's plan for the capital and located it at Omaha, and according to the *Palladium*, "against the wishes of the great majority of the people . . . for the pecuniary and personal benefit

³⁷ *Nebraska Palladium*, December 27, 1854.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, February 7, 1855.

of Tom Cuming, and his brother bribers—located at a place without any natural advantages, and one totally barren of anything, save whiskey shops and drunken politicians.”³⁹

The editor of the *Palladium* refused to admit defeat. “Bellevue, although defeated now, will win the prize in the end,” he wrote. “Her natural advantages cannot be lied down or legislated away. The God of Nature has placed her near the Great Platte and Missouri Rivers—guaranteed her the convenience they afford, and set the *great signet* of beauty and grandeur upon her brow.”⁴⁰

The *Palladium* ceased publication less than a month after this song of hope was written. Morton, after the capital had been located, lost any hopes he might have had for Bellevue’s future. He had been appointed clerk of the Territorial Supreme Court, and these duties occupied him during the winter months, but as the ice began to break in the river, he busied himself with the search for a new home. The following letter from his father spurred him in his efforts to find a place where he might achieve success:

Last evening I met a Mr. Morrow who inquired particularly after you. Said in conversation that he had urged you to study the law & be admitted before leaving here, this you know was my own wish. He also, with all your friends in the city & county regret your contest with Cuming. Because you must fail in it as he will be sustained & by the very men, too, by whom you expect to be sustained. You have, thus far, failed so many times, that to me it is very discouraging—failing to graduate, in the publication of your magazine—now failing of an election in Nebraska & then again in obtaining your seat, looks bad, very bad, indeed. I am fearful you are unsuspectingly used by certain designing men in & about Bellevue for their advantage and your great injury. The population is made up of political and land speculators. Any of them would use you or any other person to accomplish their ends at your sacrifice and then laugh at you for thus confiding in them & their promises. I am still of the opinion you better return, settle down, study law, establish a character & then begin the world understandingly. I confess it disturbs me & your Mother also & makes us unhappy to see you alluded to almost daily as you have been in the Council Bluffs, Omaha, and Detroit papers as going into college at one door & being kicked out at the other &c &c. Now the sawmill business is a *humbug*, let it alone. If there are any fools in Nebraska let them build saw mills & you sell them the timber if they want it & will *pay cash* for it . . . If I had \$10,000 not a dollar should go into a saw mill in Michigan or Nebraska . . . Now Sterling, shun the papers, and

³⁹ It was charged, but never proved, that members of the legislature were offered as much as \$4,000 in Omaha scrip for their votes on the bill locating the capital at Omaha.

⁴⁰ *Nebraska Palladium*, January 31, 1855; March 28, 1855.

politics as you would the "Devil and Dr. Tappan," let them alone. If you want to farm, put everything into it & go to work yourself on it and abandon all other business. If you want to go into a saw mill do so, by doing the work *yourself* & abandon any and all other business. If you wish to attach to the law do that & do *nothing else*, by this I mean make all other business secondary to this. In a word, fix on something & *do it, don't fail*. . . .⁴¹

The letter touched young Morton's sensitive, hotheaded pride. His first reaction to it was that "he would not leave Nebraska in five years, nor until he had achieved some great undertaking."⁴²

It might have been expected that, being determined to show his father he could make something of himself, after his defeat as a partisan of Bellevue, he would take the council of expediency and follow victory to Omaha. His talents had already found use in the political center of the territory as clerk of the Supreme Court, and it is fair to infer that they might have been put to other and more profitable employments.

His implacable and aggressive spirit rebelled at such a thought. He realized that he could not achieve his goal in co-operation with Thomas B. Cuming. There was not room for both of them in the territory: they were too nearly the same age and possessed of too nearly the same abilities and ambitions. One or the other must be in the ascendancy, not both. Morton, a clever if youthful strategist, decided that the way to fight Cuming was to fight his capital.

The vantage point from which this fight could best be carried on was Nebraska City, some fifty miles to the south of Omaha and the most considerable town in the South Platte region. The citizens of Nebraska City were anxious to have Morton settle in their midst. They could see that in the young man they would have an able and enthusiastic champion of the South Platte cause, and an ardent enemy of the territorial administration.⁴³

An arrangement was worked out whereby Morton was to edit the *Nebraska City News* for the sum of \$1,000 a year.⁴⁴ His father had advised him to "shun the papers," but this was just the opportunity for which he was looking. He would achieve his great undertaking. He would fight Tom Cuming to the finish.

⁴¹ J. D. Morton to Morton, February 21, 1855.

⁴² Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, April 7, 1855.

⁴³ Morton-Watkins, I:281.

⁴⁴ Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, April 7, 1855.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CONSERVATIVE AT TWENTY-THREE

MORTON REMOVED to Nebraska City in April, 1855, and assumed editorial control of the *Nebraska City News* on April 12, just ten days before his twenty-third birthday.

The *News* is still in existence, and now occupies a comfortable brick building, furnished with modern equipment.¹ When Morton first edited it, the entire establishment was housed in the second story of the United States military blockhouse of old Fort Kearny, built in 1846.² A paper had been started in Nebraska City in the fall of 1854 by Dr. Henry Bradford, with the name *Nebraska News*. Like many another early Western newspaper, publication was begun before the arrival of the press and other necessary equipment. It was first printed across the river in Sidney, Iowa, but was moved to Nebraska City on November 14.³ This publication had appeared only spasmodically and it had folded up altogether before Morton's arrival. It was left for him to give Nebraska City a permanent, regularly issued newspaper.

Morton's contract with the town company gave him the right to employ such help as he needed. As printer and foreman of the rude

¹ It has been combined with the *Nebraska City Press*, and is now issued under the name of *Nebraska Daily News-Press*.

² J. Sterling Morton, "Territorial Journalism," *Proceedings and Collections*, Nebraska State Historical Society (Second Series), V:23. A replica of the blockhouse was constructed in 1938, near the spot where the original stood. A stone monument bearing three bronze inscriptions marks the original location.

³ Morton-Watkins, II:344.

little office, he hired Thomas Morton, whom he had known in Bellevue as printer for the *Palladium*. Though their names were the same, the two men were not related. Thomas Morton was born in Wales, in 1829, and as an infant had been taken to Columbus, Ohio. After learning the trade of a printer in Louisville, Kentucky, he had gone gold hunting in California, with only fair success. After wandering around California and Mexico for several years he turned up in St. Marys, Iowa, in May 1854. He became printer for the *Palladium*, and set up the first column of reading matter ever put in type in the territory of Nebraska.⁴ In Nebraska City he did not remain long an employee. Soon after his arrival he purchased the *News* from the town company, and continued as part or sole owner of the paper until his death in 1887.

The *Palladium* had ceased publication early in April 1855. When Thomas Morton came down the river to Nebraska City he brought part of its equipment to be used in the publication of the *News*. He also brought along that paper's subscription list. The two Mortons numbered their paper not from the preceding issues of the *News*, but from the *Palladium*. Thus the present *News-Press* is not only the oldest continuous publication in the state of Nebraska, but also the successor to the first paper ever published in the territory.

For pressman, Morton had the services of Shack Grayson, a colored slave owned by Stephen F. Nuckolls. Nuckolls was one of the early proprietors of the town company, and had been especially influential in persuading Morton to move to Nebraska City and take over the *News*. His slave—one of the few in the territory—probably was furnished the editor on printing days as an economy for both the town company and the editor. Shack was an enterprising negro, but evidently he didn't absorb much of the Democratic doctrine preached by the *News*, for after the Civil War he is reported to have become a colored carpetbagger, and to have gone to Mississippi where he was last heard of as taking part in the deliberations of a Reconstruction Convention.⁵

Though Nebraska City was the first town to be incorporated by the territorial legislature, it did not receive its charter until March

⁴ *Ibid.*, II:337-338n.

⁵ Augustus F. Harvey, *Sketches of the Early Days of Nebraska City, Nebraska Territory, 1854-1860* (St. Louis, 1871), 11.

1855. Morton as editor of the *News* was not so much the chronicler of an established town as he was the publicity agent for the Nebraska City Town Company. In later life, he wrote of the publicity function of the early newspapers: "Each newspaper in the Territory was at that time merely the advance agent of a town company which was to act either successfully or otherwise in the drama of building a city—of establishing and maintaining a municipality. Out of this fact was evolved a selfish style of journalism and a markedly personal sort of paragraphing."⁶

A large part of each issue of the paper was purchased by the town company and sent East to attract prospective settlers. Hence, the editorial columns were well filled with articles praising the natural beauty of the town's location, its rapid growth both in numbers of business establishments and "an industrious and intelligent population." Any slur cast by a neighboring editor was fully explained away or emphatically denied, and always amply repaid in kind. Each Missouri River editor was certain that his town was the gateway to the West, and was to become the crossing city for the great Pacific Railroad which was looked for in the near future.

Morton, in a speech delivered at the first territorial fair, held in Nebraska City in 1859, said of that early optimism:

We all felt, as they used to print in large letters on every new town plat, that we were "located adjacent to the very finest groves of timber, surrounded by a very rich agricultural country, in prospective, abundantly supplied with building rock of the finest description, beautifully watered, and possessing very fine indications of lead, iron, coal, and salt in great abundance." In my opinion we felt richer, better and more millionarish than any poor deluded mortals ever did on the same amount of moonshine and pluck.

The early territorial towns developed in an atmosphere of perpetual boom. Town companies were formed on every hand, and shares in the new municipal corporations were eagerly sought as a sure way to a portion of the wealth that was bound to come. As Morton later said, the greater part of their time was spent "talking and meditating upon the prospective value of city property. Young Chicagos, increscent New Yorks, precocious Philadelphias, and in-

⁶ Morton, "Territorial Journalism," *loc. cit.*, 24.

fant Londons were duly staked out, lithographed, divided into shares, and puffed with becoming unction and complaisance."⁷

Nebraska City was a prominent mart for the town stock business by virtue of its location, a good point from which to carry on speculation in lots of the mythical cities that were to arise out of the prairies. Augustus E. Harvey, one of the early residents, once told a story that well illustrates the speculative spirit which had the little town in its grip in the Fifties. It seems that Johnny Freeman, the devil in the *News* office, was short of funds. To raise some necessary cash he decided to put a little new town-stock on the market. He took a town-stock blank, removed the name in type and inserted the name of "Xenia." Then on a Sunday afternoon he printed a couple of hundred blanks, the usual number, got a friend to assist in signing them up with the first names they could think of, for president and secretary, and sold the whole batch to one Joe Ellis, a dealer in scraps, for \$2.50. Ellis evidently knew what he was doing when he became the sole proprietor of the "town" of Xenia, for by the next week he is reported to have bulled Xenia shares into the market so that they were current at \$25 each.⁸

So great was the faith of the early settlers in the future of their districts that property in the river towns often commanded enormous prices. In 1857, 25'x125' lots on the river landings of some of the towns were valued at \$10,000. Three or four blocks back they sold for \$2,000, and even those at half a mile distance brought \$1,200.⁹ Such prices, current in the late Fifties, resulted in great profit to those who got on the ground before the speculative mania reached its height. Morton reported that before the surveys began in 1856, claims did not sell with great rapidity or at large figures. One quarter section in 1855 brought only \$50 on six months' time, and another sold for \$650. Between these two prices, almost any claim within a distance of four miles from Nebraska City could have been readily purchased.¹⁰

The early actuality of municipal development was as nothing when compared to the dreams of future greatness. Take, for ex-

⁷ "Speech Delivered at First Territorial Fair . . .," 4.

⁸ Harvey, *op. cit.*, 19.

⁹ Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 53.

¹⁰ Speech delivered at Nebraska City, July 4, 1876 (Pamphlet, Morton Collection), 14.

ample, the first sale of lots in Nebraska City, held May 5, 1855. Morton acted as auctioneer, and as he later described the occasion: "There must have been a multitude in attendance, which numbered at least seventeen or eighteen, and about five of them were not members of the town company, and against them every patriotic resident of this hopeful neighborhood—except myself, and I was the auctioneer and couldn't—bid with great and vehement vigor" . . .¹¹

The immigrant, having been lured to some particular Nebraska town by the glowing newspaper accounts of the vast building program, beautiful churches, growing business, and inviting parks, must often have been sorely disappointed at what he found. Instead of regular rows of well-built houses and a busy commercial section, he saw only a scene of the most primitive character. Perhaps there was an occasional graded street, but more often there were only foot-paths leading up and down natural ravines to the scattered dug-outs, log cabins, and other rude dwellings which composed the town.¹²

Nebraska City had some fifty houses in the spring of 1855, and so was much in advance of the usual river town. But even so, there was no place suitable for Mrs. Morton, and arrangements were made for her to stay at Omaha until her husband could find adequate quarters.¹³ In a short time these plans, too, were changed. The Mortons were expecting a child, and it was decided that it would be better for the prospective mother to be confined in her old home rather than trust to the medical skill of the frontier. So, in the summer she went back to Detroit where on September 27 the first of four sons was born. The parents gave him his mother's maiden name: Joy.

While his wife was absent, the young husband busied himself with providing a home for his little family. He purchased the claim of Richard Pell, a squatter, to a quarter section of land west of town. The claim was traversed by South Table Creek and on the banks of the creek was a small log house, about one-eighth of a mile south of the present mansion. Here Morton lived while supervising the construction of the small frame building which was to be

¹¹ A. T. Andreas, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (Chicago, 1882), II:1201.

¹² Dick, *The Sod House Frontier*, 56.

¹³ Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, April 7, 1855.

his permanent home, and which, in the years to come, was destined to develop into one of the noteworthy homes of the entire West. The original building was a small structure, built in the shape of an *L*—a not unusual style. Proudly young Morton welcomed his wife and son into it. And well he might have been proud, for there was not a single frame house between it and the Rocky Mountains.¹⁴

Young Morton, in addition to being the chronicler and sometimes the prophet of the ambitious little settlement on the Missouri, took an active part in the political affairs of the pioneer community. He had come to Nebraska to win either fortune or political success and had moved to Nebraska City because being thwarted at his original location, he felt that the South Platte town offered him the best opportunity. The residents of Nebraska City had recognized his ability and energy at the time the members of the town company offered him the editorship of their paper. In the autumn of 1855, they further expressed their confidence by electing him as one of their representatives in the Second Territorial Legislature.

Election to the legislature from the most important South Platte county gave Morton an opportunity to carry on his fight against Cuming and his capital with other means than the editorial pen. Once in the legislature, he soon got into a position which placed him in the vanguard of the anti-Omaha element, a group which included representatives from all the South Platte counties, and some from towns north of the Platte whose residents were disaffected by the location of the capital at Omaha. He was made chairman of the committee on public buildings and grounds, and was placed second on the committees on common schools and printing.¹⁵

The chairmanship of the committee on public buildings and grounds was looked upon as one of the most important posts in the territorial houses of representatives. The location of the capital was the juiciest plum in the dispensation of the territorial assembly, and no work of a previous legislature on this subject was considered necessarily binding or permanent. The anti-Omaha representatives came to the second session with the express purpose of undoing the

¹⁴ Abbott, "Some Morton Houses, Log and Frame, Real and Imaginary" (Ms. in possession of the author), 5.

¹⁵ *House Journal*, Nebraska Territorial Legislature, Second Session.

work of their predecessors.¹⁶ They were strong enough to elect an outspoken anti-Omaha man, Sullivan of Washington County, as Speaker of the House. His choice of Morton to head the committee which had the initiative on capital matters is a fair indication that despite his youth, Morton's anti-Omaha leadership was recognized not only in Nebraska City, but in the territory at large.

The newly-appointed chairman lost no time in making matters uncomfortable for the enemies of the South Platte and for his own particular enemy, Thomas Cuming. Early in the session he introduced a resolution requesting the Secretary, "to exhibit to the Chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings all documents in regard to the said buildings, including estimates, contracts, &c &c." ¹⁷

The resolution was laid on the table, and Morton was unsuccessful in his first attempt to embarrass the Secretary. Undismayed, a few days later he made a stronger attempt to develop evidence which he was sure would be inimical to Secretary Cuming. He introduced a resolution inquiring into the action of James C. Mitchell who had been commissioned by the first legislature to select the exact spot where the capitol should be erected. The legislature wanted to control the development of the territory's first city by selecting for itself the capitol site, and as a condition precedent to his appointment, Mitchell had been required to pledge himself to select as the site for the building, the line between what was known as the Clancy and Jeffrey claims. The wishes of the lawmakers were not fulfilled; for after they had gone home Mitchell had chosen a different location. After reciting the facts of the case, Morton's resolution provided:

That James C. Mitchell be and hereby is respectfully requested to present to both Houses of the legislative assembly a report stating fully and explicitly all that he has done relative to the performance of the duties enjoined in said commission, stating fully and explicitly the reasons that induced him to depart from his pledged honor . . . and whether there was any reward or promise offered him to influence the location or selection of the site for said building . . .

That in the event of any person or persons having offered any inducements pecuniarily or otherwise, or having used any arguments to influence his action as said commissioner that the name or names of said person or persons be given, with all inducements offered.

¹⁶ Morton-Watkins, I:278.

¹⁷ *House Journal*, Second Session, 33.

The House, after considerable controversy, passed the resolution by a vote of 14 to 10,¹⁸ but there is no record that Mr. Mitchell ever presented the requested report. Morton did not push the matter further. He may have forgotten all about it. He was only twenty-three. Many of his colleagues were almost as young. Pioneer Nebraska political strategy often was characterized by the erratic exuberance of youth rather than the sustained calmness of maturity. The early politicians often acted solely for momentary effect, and then quickly passed on to something else.

Morton did not confine his attempts to embarrass Secretary Cumming to the capital question. Early in the session he asked for an inquiry into the expenditures for public printing, and later introduced a resolution "requiring" the Secretary "to lay before the House of Representatives a copy of his instructions which he alleges to have received from the Comptroller of the United States Treasury, in regard to the pay of clerks, firemen, and chaplains for the Territory." The resolutions passed, but only after a more diplomatic member had moved to substitute "requested" for "required" and "has" for "alleges to have."¹⁹

These resolutions are not important for what they achieved, for they produced no tangible results; but, as an historian of Nebraska has written, in these early measures which made no attempt to conceal their author's scorn of his adversary, one could, "read . . . the forecast and the epitome of the man; the same undisguised and relentless attack on opponents, the abandon in giving battle which burns the bridges of retreat, and the uncompromising and implacable spirit which, while they were perhaps the chief source of his strength, yet almost uniformly defeated his political aspirations."²⁰

In introducing these resolutions Morton asked the Secretary to account to the legislature for expenditures for which, technically at least, he was accountable only to the Treasury Department of the Federal Government. This is particularly interesting in view of his own uncompromising refusal, when Secretary of the territory himself, to recognize any authority on the part of the legislature over

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60, 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, 135.

²⁰ Morton-Watkins, I:279.

money appropriated by the federal government for the territory.²¹

None of Morton's resolutions accomplished the purpose for which they were introduced. The young legislator, however, was ingenious if nothing else; and when it became clear that resolutions requiring the Secretary or his agents to do this or that would not provide a wedge that could be driven between Omaha and the capital, he struck at the problem from another angle.

If he could not bring the capital to the South Platte he would take the South Platte out of the territory. He introduced a memorial to Congress asking that all of Nebraska lying south of the Platte River be annexed to Kansas. This action was requested not only for the welfare of the territory of Nebraska, but to provide "harmony and quiet throughout the entire domain of our cherished government." He said that the Platte River was a natural boundary "and seems as though intended by nature for the natural dividing line between two great States." Further, "It is almost impossible (and thus far has been perfectly so) to either ford, ferry or bridge this stream. It . . . separates both in identity of interests, and in fact, the portions of Nebraska lying upon opposite sides of it." Finally, he urged the annexation because it would "effectually prevent the establishment of slavery in either of the territories, and . . . guarantee the freedom of the Territory of Kansas, whose fate in regard to this great question is still undecided and doubtful."²²

This attempt to wrest the capital from Omaha by throwing the territory into fear of dismemberment was to prove just as futile as had Morton's barrage of resolutions against Secretary Cuming. The memorial was permanently tabled. Nevertheless, it introduced a new factor into the sectional struggle which divided the territory until the time of statehood. The secessionist movement, at first only a trick designed to force Cuming's hand, gained considerable support in the South Platte area, and at one time it appeared likely that it would succeed.

As far as Morton himself was concerned, the secessionist project was of the same nature as the resolutions inquiring into Mitchell's action in the location of the capital—merely another spur-of-the-

²¹ See Chapter VII.

²² *House Journal*, Second Session, 120.

moment effort to defeat Cuming. Morton never pressed it with much vigor, though from time to time during the territorial struggle he did give it nominal support. Nevertheless, his original advocacy of the dismemberment of the territory stood against him during the rest of his political life. It has been said that his effort to divide the territory was an important reason why he, virtually alone of the prominent territorial pioneers, does not have a county or town in the state named for him.²³

As long as Morton was at the front in the fight against Cuming and his Omaha capital, his course was popular with at least a portion of his colleagues. Certainly it had the support of his constituents in Nebraska City who looked with a jaundiced eye upon Omaha's claims to greatness. Morton, however, was not waging his war on Cuming solely to please his constituents. Cuming had proved himself an inevitable enemy and Morton undoubtedly would have fought him whether or not he had been representing the most considerable town among Omaha's rivals. Associates were to learn that his was an independent character. He gave ample proof of that fact near the end of the session when he espoused an issue that left him standing virtually alone.

Influenced by the spirit of perpetual boom that had taken hold of Nebraska, the Second Territorial Legislature, deeming it necessary to have more money in the country, created by special acts six banks of issue. Under each of these acts a bank could be started by five men, issue its own currency without any legal reserve against it, and open its doors for business as soon as half of the initial capital was—not paid, but subscribed. In addition to being allowed to begin operations before a cent of capital had been paid in, each bank was authorized to "buy and sell property of all kinds,"²⁴ thus opening the door to unlimited speculation. The notes issued by such banks were quite properly known as "wildcat money." The shrewd were slow to accept them. Everett Dick, in *The Sod House Frontier*, tells a story that well illustrates the distrust merited by most of the paper money issued by the Western banks: "Along the Kansas shore a steamboat captain pulled up to a wood yard and bellowed out, 'Is

²³ N. C. Abbott to the author, in conversation.

²⁴ Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People*, I:271.

your wood dry?' 'Yep,' was the reply. 'What is your wood worth?' shouted the captain. 'What kind of money do yer tote, cap?' asked the wood merchant. 'The best money on earth, the new Platte Valley Bank.' 'If that's so, cap,' was the rejoinder, 'I'll trade cord for cord.'²⁵

As a twenty-three year old booster for one of the towns that was booming the most, Morton might have been expected to favor the creation of such banks. Surely he would have become a proponent of such action had he listened to his constituents and colleagues. He vehemently opposed, however, all of the banking bills to come before the legislature. As a member of the select committee to which was referred the act to incorporate the Southern Bank of Nebraska, he submitted a minority report opposing the bill. So contrary were the opinions of his colleagues that the House, by a margin of one vote, refused to receive the report.²⁶ Fortunately, the manuscript has been preserved. The report, which Morton declared was submitted, "in duty to myself and the Democratic party of which I am a representative," was a vigorous denunciation of the legislature's financial record:

Thus far I have opposed and voted against every Bill granting Banking privileges which has come before this House. And I have done so because I have been able to see neither the necessity [*sic*] nor the propriety of establishing and legalizing Swindling Powers in this young and flourishing territory. I regard the forty days just passing away as the advent time of wildcats into Nebraska. And I believe they will be remembered hereafter by the people of this territory as the forty days in which Nebraska committed financial suicide [*sic*]. We have legislated into existence five Banks with power to issue six millions of rag money and no one can prove either the necessity [*sic*] or the utility of such monied monstrosities in any country. On the other hand they are dangerous to the prosperity of our Commonwealth at home and ruinous to our credit abroad. I had hope that our *Democratic* Executive would like Andrew Jackson say no more Banks, take the responsibility upon himself and strangle every new-born wildcat with a veto gag. But in this I with many other Democrats have been sadly disappointed. I have therefore only one small trifle of satisfaction left me, and that is to report back the bill providing for the incorporation of the Southern Bank of Nebraska and recommend its rejection, its destruction and its final consignment to that oblivion where all the rest ought to have been sent.

Hoping for the best, but hoping against probabilities I respectfully submit the above for your consideration.

²⁵ Dick, *op. cit.*, 92.

²⁶ *House Journal*, Second Session, 139.

He was indeed "hoping against probabilities." The bill was passed; the Southern Bank of Nebraska received its charter; the legislature adjourned; and Morton returned to Nebraska City to reassume direct control of the *News* and to discover that he was not the popular young man who forty days before had been sent to the legislature to wrest the capital from Omaha. He had failed to do anything more than irritate Secretary Cuming and his Omaha adherents, and, in the minds of many, by his refusal to support measures believed necessary to the material well-being of the territory, had proved himself recreant to the best interests of his constituents. He ran for re-election in the fall of 1856 and was decisively defeated.

For a time it appeared that he had been wrong in his opposition to the banking bills. The territorial pioneers had a boom on their hands and were making the most of it. Out of the inflated currency prices rose to fabulous heights. Daylight did not furnish enough time for the development of the wonderful schemes that were under foot. So great was the rush that in some instances houses were roofed by lamplight.²⁷

Even the terrible winter which commenced with a life-taking storm on the first two days of December did not chill the optimism of those plucky pioneers. The Third Territorial Legislature convened under circumstances that saw deer running through the streets of the towns seeking safety from the wolves which followed them on the ice-encrusted snow.²⁸ Yet Governor Izard in his annual message to the legislature was so swept away by the optimism that he could boast of a territorial population of "not more than 15,000 intelligent, orderly and energetic citizens," of the "flourishing towns and prosperous cities, with their handsome church edifices, well-regulated schools and busy streets," of the "broad and beautiful prairies, thickly dotted with comfortable farm houses and well-cultivated fields, yielding their rich treasures to the hand of peaceful industry," and of many other wonders which existed only in the Governor's unperturbed mind.²⁹

Actually, if Morton's evidence can be taken, so miserable was the state of all the arts except that of "boosting" that during 1856 the

²⁷ Dick, *op. cit.*, 89.

²⁸ Morton, "Fourth of July Address, 1876," *loc. cit.*

²⁹ *House Journal*, Third Session, 11.

residents of the territory had not raised enough to supply half their home wants. "We were more than ever a nation of boarders," he declared, "eating everything eatable, buying everything consumable—but producing absolutely nothing."³⁰

After having listened to a message such as the roseate one delivered by Governor Izard it is not strange, perhaps, that the legislature should continue the course begun by its predecessor. In his speech at the first territorial fair, Morton succinctly described the activities of the third session:

A grand rally was had for the purpose of raising more means and more money by legislative legerdemain. New towns were incorporated, and new shares issued, insurance companies were chartered with nothing to insure and nothing to insure with; and finally another batch of wildcat banks was set for hatching, it having been deliberately decided that the easiest way to make money was through the autographs of fancy financiers. Not less than fifteen new banks were contemplated and projected. Preparations were thus coolly and deliberately made for issuing evidence of debt amounting, in the aggregate, to millions of dollars, and a confiding and generous public were expected to receive them as money.

Of the fifteen projected bank bills, only six were passed, and all of these were vetoed by Governor Izard who evidently had got out from under the spell of his own oratory. Two banks were chartered over the Governor's veto.³¹

The boom persisted through the spring and early summer. Land continued to be sold at fabulous and ever-mounting prices. One very ordinary farm near Nebraska City brought \$12,000, cash, and other property in the vicinity sold at proportionately exorbitant prices. Morton later said that "it seemed for a time as though the art of making 'something' out of 'nothing' had been invented and perfected by means of our wild-cat banking system,"³² and that "the old fogies themselves were beginning to believe in the new way of making money without labor."³³

Then, late in the summer news began to filter into the territory telling of the failure of many well-established firms back in the States—John Thompson, the Ohio Life and Trust Company, and others. At first the territorial financiers thought themselves safe

³⁰ Morton, "Territorial Fair Address," 5.

³¹ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I:276.

³² Morton, "Fourth of July Address," *loc. cit.*

³³ Morton, "Territorial Fair Address," *loc. cit.*

from the storm,³⁴ but as the rumbling of falling banking houses continued to spread, and increased in volume, the panic reached Nebraska. As fast as they had been erected, the territorial banks came tumbling down. Their notes had never been acceptable in the States and now they became utterly worthless even in the territory. As Morton put it: "The individual liability of stockholders as marked on each bill, proved to mean that the bill-holders themselves were individually responsible for whatever they might find on hand after the crisis."³⁵

As the banking houses, one after another, closed their doors, their utter irresponsibility was brought into full light. The settlement of DeSoto, for example, had two banks. One of these had an office, safe, and cashier; but all the other had to show for its existence was its name engraved upon its bills. A sheriff's writ of execution against the closed Bank of Nebraska at Omaha showed as assets: "Thirteen sacks of flour, one large iron safe, one counter, one desk, one stove drum and pipe, three arm chairs, and one map of Douglas County."³⁶

As the false prosperity was blown away, as the people of Otoe County, left in abject poverty, considered the cause of their plight, they began to sense that the twenty-three year old boy who had refused to follow the fancies of the hour had been nearer to the truth than many older and supposedly wiser heads. In the reaction that followed the panic Morton was sent from Otoe County to the legislature and once again, it appeared, the South Platte region was to be represented by one of its most aggressive and colorful figures.

³⁴ Morton, "Fourth of July Address," 20.

³⁵ Morton, "Territorial Fair Address," 7.

³⁶ Dick, *op. cit.*, 90.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM SECTIONAL PARTISAN TO TERRITORIAL LEADER

THE FOURTH SESSION of the Nebraska Territorial Legislature was convened December 8, 1857. No other gathering of Nebraska's lawmakers has achieved so much publicity for doing so little. It is known in the history of Nebraska as the "Do Nothing" legislature, the chief activity being the secession of the majority of the body to Florence, the old "Winter Quarters" of the Mormon migration.

The territorial legislators still were fighting over the location of the capital. Each sizable town cherished the hope that it might be able to wrest the honor from Omaha. The relocation of the capital had been an issue in every territorial session, though during the days of the banking boom it had not had quite the immediacy commanded by special bills chartering banks, insurance companies, and town lot agencies. At the time of the fourth session, however, the illusion that the territory could be legislated into prosperity had been swept away, and having lost interest in special bills of charter, the legislators found time to consider again the capital question. This was a sectional issue. Frontier ambitions, frontier passions magnified it to such an extent that for a time deliberative lawmaking was abandoned to a typical frontier row.

No blood was shed during the controversy, but much ink has been spilt since. No one account, unfortunately presents a satisfactory picture of just what took place. The contemporary records are marred by bitter partisanship. The later ones suffer either from too much condensation, or from bias in favor of one side or the other.

Morton had a considerable part in the controversy. Likewise, it was important in marking his development from a mere sectional partisan of the South Platte region into a politician who had at heart the interests of the entire territory. For these reasons, and in the interest of accurate history generally the paragraphs that follow will attempt to distill an accurate description of the breakup of the fourth legislature and of Morton's part in it.

When the legislature convened Morton was a conspicuous member of the South Platte delegation, but he was by no means the uncontested leader of that group. Party lines had not yet been drawn in Nebraska politics and the distribution of political offices was largely a personal or sectional matter. In the fourth legislature it was, to a certain extent, both. The two leading candidates for the position of Speaker of the House were both from Otoe County: James H. Decker and J. Sterling Morton.

Decker was a man of about thirty, originally from Kentucky, and one of the first settlers of Nebraska City. He was a brickmason by trade and had furnished the brick used in building the first brick house constructed in Nebraska City. He had taken an important part in local and territorial politics since his arrival in the territory, and had been sent to the first and second legislatures before being elected to the fourth.¹

Decker defeated Morton, after a rather heated contest, by a vote of 20 to 12.² Morton had made it clear from the beginning that he did not think relocation of the capital expedient, and that he would oppose any attempt to do so because it would hold up much needed legislation. This attitude quite naturally won him the support of the large Douglas County delegation, but it cost him the friendship of the South Platte members. Stories were circulated that he had sold himself out to his enemies. An extended visit in Detroit and other Eastern cities prior to the opening of the legislature was made the basis for a rumor that he was about to remove his residence to Chicago. The *Nebraska City News* attributed Morton's defeat to these reports.³

Morton's attitude toward the Douglas County delegation was

¹ Morton-Watkins, I:299n.

² *House Journal*, Fourth Session, 11.

³ December 19, 1857.

looked upon by his enemies as springing from the most evil of personal motives. It appears, however, that it was Decker rather than Morton who bargained with the members from Omaha. After the legislature had adjourned, Dr. George L. Miller, of Omaha, who was to become one of Morton's closest political and personal friends, wrote:

Pop [A. J. Poppleton] will not reply to Decker, but I think will make a full exposé of his bargains on the Speaker question, his backing out, and then renewing his propositions to be sound for Omaha in case the Delegation would leave you and go over to his support. . . . I had something to say & hear about your position upon the question of the capital, and I had occasion to tell our delegation on one occasion that you would enter into no bargains on any question, which fact they subsequently fully understood. . . .⁴

Having been defeated for the speakership, it seemed that Morton was to be relegated to an unimportant role in the legislature's proceedings. He was appointed to the chairmanship of no committees, and of his three appointments—agriculture, library, and public printing—only the last could be said to be at all important in a political way. This defeat did not abash Morton's partisans. The *Omaha Times* said it had, "not injured him in the least. He is one of the *Rising Men of the West*—a young man whose aptness and brilliancy of intellect would secure for him a high position in any community."⁵ The *Nebraska City News* (no longer edited by Morton) called his defeat, "a check only temporary for *it is written* that his star is to culminate in the highest position which the Territory or State can grant."

The breakup of the legislature once more gave Morton an opportunity to assume territorial leadership.

From the very beginning of the session it was evident that a large number of the legislators were in favor of moving the capital from Omaha to some South Platte town. The Douglas County representatives, in an effort to prevent this, had entered into arrangements with members from both the North and South Platte counties to support their individual bills if only the capital scheme would be dropped.⁶

⁴ George L. Miller to Morton, February 2, 1858.

⁵ Reprinted in the *Nebraska City News*, December 19, 1857.

⁶ Morton-Watkins, I:327.

For a time it appeared that the log-rolling activities of the Douglas County men were to prove successful. Then, late in the afternoon of January 6, just nine days before the session was to end, J. G. Abbe, of Otoe County, introduced into the House an "Act to relocate the seat of Government." Morton moved that it be ordered printed and further consideration postponed until after that was done. His motion carried, and the House recessed until the next morning.⁷

A number of events had led up to the introduction of the bill that thwarted the hopes of the Douglas County representatives.

At the time the capital was located, the Omaha Town Company had donated to the territory the land upon which the building was to be erected. Then, after the congressional appropriation of \$50,000 had proved insufficient to complete the construction of the capitol, the City of Omaha, on its own initiative, had assumed the labor and expense of finishing it. To pay for this, and also to assist in erecting a jail, courthouse, and hotel in the city, they had issued \$60,000 of corporation scrip, in small sums, to become a circulating medium. The scrip was advertised as secured by a pledge of city property. After the bank failures of 1857 there were numerous inquiries from billholders and others in the territory as to just what property, and in what amount, was pledged for the redemption of the bills. In answer to these inquiries, a list of the pledged properties was published in the city papers, and to the dismay and astonishment of the legislators, especially those from south of the Platte, included in this list was "Capitol Square and the buildings thereon." The territory had never secured a deed to the property, and according to the proponents of the bill relocating the capital, Mr. Abbe's action was based on the thought that the introduction of a capital bill would produce such a document. They claimed that prior to this an attempt had been made to secure a deed from the city authorities and had failed.

According to Robert W. Furnas, a council member from Nemaha County, south of the Platte, the Douglas County members on the night of January 6, swore on the streets and in the barrooms that "unless that Bill be withdrawn, not another act of any kind would

⁷ *House Journal*, Fourth Session, 149.

pass during the session . . . that the Capitol belonged to Omaha, and she would retain it, even though it cost the heart's blood of Douglas County . . . that the legislative halls would be drenched in blood." ⁸

Whether or not they made known such violent intentions, the opponents of the bill held a caucus that evening and resolved upon a program of action for the next day. The first business in order was to be the consideration in committee of the whole of two reports from the committee on printing. It was agreed in caucus that if the Omaha men could get one of their number named chairman of the committee, they would hold the floor in discussion during the balance of the session.⁹

Oddly enough, their opportunity materialized. Speaker Decker, evidently not suspecting the plot, called W. R. Thrall, of Omaha, to the chair of the committee of the whole. He immediately recognized A. J. Poppleton, who, according to previous arrangement, opened the discussion with a long speech, obviously bent upon consuming as much time as possible.¹⁰ It was not long before the advocates of the capital bill discovered—if they had not already suspected it—that an attempt was being made to talk their bill to death by a filibuster in the committee of the whole. One by one, members of the House withdrew until only a minority of fourteen remained. Morton, consistent with his position at the opening of the session, stayed with the minority.

In the course of the session of the committee of the whole, the House had a message from Acting Governor T. B. Cuming stating that he had just received from Jesse Lowe, Mayor of Omaha, a deed for the land to be known as "Capitol Square," for the use and purposes of the capitol of the territory, and the State of Nebraska, whenever it was to become such. Had the Abbe bill been introduced merely to bluff the officials of Omaha into giving a deed for the property which they had donated, it had achieved its purpose. The committee arose to receive the report, and as Mr. Decker was absent, on the motion of Mr. Poppleton, Morton was elected speaker pro

⁸ *Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownville), January 28, 1858.

⁹ W. R. Thrall to C. S. Paine, May 19, 1904. In Morton-Watkins, I:327n.

¹⁰ *Nebraska City News*, January 16, 1858.

tem.¹¹ Shortly, the committee of the whole reported progress and asked leave to sit again, which, naturally, was granted.

Meanwhile, the majority members had retired to the bar of the Douglas House to consult as to the best means of breaking the filibuster. They decided that at three o'clock they would have the clerk of the Council appear in the House with a "message from the Council." This would furnish a pretext for raising the committee and getting Speaker Decker once again in control of the situation. They had some little difficulty in persuading the clerk of the Council to carry out their program. The Council had adjourned for the day, and the clerk was afraid that such a procedure would not be in order. Finally, however, he was persuaded to deliver the message.¹²

Residents of Omaha, sensing excitement, or fearing for their capitol, gathered in large numbers in the lobby of the House. By the time the majority had reassembled, the room was crowded to overflowing. Participants on both sides as well as the onlookers had fortified themselves freely from time to time during the day at the various bars around town, and at three o'clock the stage was set for anything but calm and deliberative legislation.

The clerk of the Council appeared and announced his message. Mr. Thrall, who still was chairman of the committee of the whole, refused to recognize any messenger from the Council unless that body was in session. When the clerk admitted that it was not in session, the chairman proceeded with the work of the committee, which at this time, according to one report, consisted of "senseless harangues on ancient history, modern civilization, the Mormon war" and other subjects equally pertinent to the Territory of Nebraska.¹³

Speaker Decker, not to be denied, mounted the rostrum, jerked the gavel from the chairman's hand, and declaring that he would "have this chair or die," attempted to push Thrall from his seat. The drunken crowd then got just what they were looking for. Every member of the House leaped to his feet. Paddock and Murphy, members from Omaha, rushed to the front, seized the Speaker's arm and attempted to drag him from the stand. Just then A. J. Hanscom

¹¹ *House Journal*, Fourth Session, 150.

¹² *Nebraska City News*, January 16, 1858.

¹³ J. H. Decker in the *Nebraska City News*, January 30, 1858.

of the lobby, a former member from Omaha and an influential resident, jumped over the rail, seized the Speaker from Paddock and Murphy, and rolled him under a table, thus effectually removing him from further participation.

All this had gone on under a terrific din. Clayer, of Douglas, who had the floor at the time the riot broke out, climbed to the top of his desk and kept right on addressing the committee. The chairman could be heard from time to time above the noise demanding order. Finally, Morton mounted a desk, got the crowd quieted down, and requested all but the members to leave the room, so that peace might be restored. This they did, and the committee and the House immediately adjourned to meet the next day at nine o'clock.

The next morning Speaker Decker took the chair as usual, and immediately entertained a motion to adjourn to meet at Florence the following day. The motion carried and the Speaker and a majority of the members left the hall. Meanwhile, the same motion was passed in the upper chamber, and a majority of the members of the Council left for Florence with their colleagues from the House.¹⁴

During the remainder of the time allotted for the meeting of the territorial legislature, Nebraska had two lawmaking bodies. The majority members, holding their sessions at "Winter Quarters" carried on as though nothing had happened. They passed a complete set of laws for the territory, and provided for the location of the capital at a place other than Omaha. The exact site was left to the discretion of a board of commissioners, but the location selected was to be called *Neapolis*.¹⁵ Perhaps it is just as well that their efforts were to prove abortive.

The minority members, remaining in Omaha, occupied themselves with an investigation of the "late disturbances in the Legislative Assembly of Nebraska," as they chose to call the breakup. Morton was named chairman of a joint committee appointed to conduct the investigation. The committee contained five members from south of the Platte, and four from north of it.

The members who had departed from Omaha declared that the attitude of the Omaha mob not only was inimical to the work of the legislature but caused "a well-grounded apprehension as to the

¹⁴ *Council Journal*, Fourth Session, 124; *House Journal*, Fourth Session, 151.

¹⁵ *Nebraska Advertiser*, February 4, 1858.

personal safety of the majority."¹⁶ Robert W. Furnas, who had voted against secession, but had followed the majority to Florence, wrote in his paper: ". . . when outsiders, prominent and wealthy citizens of Omaha, who had been goading continually the Douglas county delegation to acts of violence, rush within the bar, seize the Speaker of the House, hurl him to the floor; then we say law, order, and common decency are violated, the rights of the people trampled under foot, and insult added to injury."¹⁷

The committee of the minority occupied itself largely with a consideration of this excuse. Numerous witnesses were called to testify as to the turbulent proceedings of January 8. Virtually all of the testimony was favorable to the minority. The questions in the cross-examinations were put to bring out with the greatest possible emphasis the fact that no firearms were observed, and that beyond the dangers of an occasional bruise—a minor matter on the frontier—the members of the legislature were in no way in personal peril.

The committee's report, written by Morton, whitewashed the minority, and placed all of the blame upon the seceding majority:

. . . We hold the minority to be guiltless of any wrong in the premises, and submit the sworn statements of disinterested and reliable men, as the basis for our opinion, and invite for them a candid and careful consideration.

The charge of having deliberately and premeditatedly broken up the sitting of the legislature, paralyzed its action and prevented the transaction of all legitimate legislation, is a grave and serious one, but solemnly and seriously we make it, holding the majority to a just responsibility for what we are compelled to regard its unwarranted and revolutionary course . . .

It does not appear to the committee that any demonstrations of violence or force were made or offered on the part of the minority, but that their efforts were confined to an attempt to prevent it, and to restore order and decorum, that the business of the House might be proceeded with . . .

The minority have remained at their posts from day to day, ready and anxious, as the facts disclose, to consummate the important legislation which the best interests of the Territory demand; but their action is paralyzed by the persistent and unjustifiable course of the majority.

In regard to the occurrence in the House, which is made the pretext upon the part of the majority for abandoning their posts of duty, the proof herewith submitted clearly shows it to have been precipitated by the design or folly of the Speaker. Indeed, there is evidence of a premeditated design upon the part of the majority to obtain possession of the Chair by force . . . We are further strengthened

¹⁶ *Nebraska Advertiser*, January 21, 1858.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, January 28, 1858.

in this conclusion from the fact, that while it is not pretended that anything had occurred in the Council to disturb its deliberations, yet the majority of that body saw fit to adjourn to Florence, without any joint action by resolution with the other House. . . .¹⁸

In addition to having its own naturally very biased conclusion that it was right, the minority was upheld by the federal officers in the territory. Secretary Cuming, around whose head the whole capital controversy had raged, stood by his original location until the last. The newly appointed governor, William A. Richardson, of Quincy, Illinois, who had arrived in the territory a few days after the secession, wrote to a committee chosen by the Florence body to correspond with him, that he could not recognize them as the legislative assembly of the territory, and urged their immediate return to the capital. He guaranteed them the fullest and most ample protection. This he did, "without inquiring into or expressing an opinion upon" the violence that had occurred before his arrival in the territory.¹⁹ Experience Estabrook, United States District Attorney for Nebraska, wrote to Morton that in his opinion the secessionists had acted in an illegal way, and that no act of legislature or precedent would uphold the laws made by them.²⁰

Morton's position during the entire episode, while fearlessly consistent with his original declaration, was not calculated to endear him to his constituents in Otoe County. Columbus Nuckolls, a member of the prominent Nuckolls family whose members had been influential in getting Morton to move to Nebraska City, wrote from Glenwood, Iowa: ". . . I never offered to bet with any person that you would be run out of Nebraska City. The only thing that I proposed to bet on was that 7/8 of the members that adjourned to Florence would be re-elected if they ran. I further stated that I did not believe the people of Otoe would ever elect you again from the very fact that you had united with the Omaha corruption party and it was generally believed you had sold yourself . . . since you have

¹⁸ *House Journal*, Fourth Session, 153, ff.

¹⁹ W. A. Richardson to L. L. Bowner, J. H. Campbell, and E. A. Donelan, January 12, 1858. In *Nebraska Advertiser*, January 21, 1858.

²⁰ E. Estabrook to Morton, January 15, 1858. In *Nebraska City News*, January 23, 1858.

done what I consider injustice to your constituents I take you to be a man unworthy of confidence." ²¹

Morton replied in characteristic fashion: ". . . As for any opinion you may have formed of my course at Omaha City it is of no consequence to me whatever, whether that opinion be good bad or indifferent. . . . If the Nuckolls are my best friends or ever were I am certainly hard up, and truly a *suspicious* character . . ." ²²

At the suggestion of the *News*, then edited by Milton W. Reynolds, a meeting was held in Nebraska City at which the Otoe County representatives attempted to justify their course in the proceedings. Decker and Morton, having been in positions of leadership and on opposite sides, quite naturally were the most important speakers on this occasion. Decker declared that the adjournment of the majority was the result solely of external influences, the outside pressure of the lobby, and the threats of violence. He declared that had it not been for those circumstances, they could have handled the factious minority. When asked why they did not return to the capital when assured of protection by Governor Richardson, he answered: "Because we had determined upon a different course."

The majority, according to Decker, felt that the protection offered by the Governor would not have been adequate. The *News*, reporting the meeting, remarked editorially: ". . . We believe it is generally admitted by the majority members and almost if not universally believed by the people, that not a hair of their heads would have been harmed after the arrival of the Governor, if indeed, they were in any danger before his advent. . . ." ²³

In his turn, Morton said that he had told his colleagues in their first caucus that he would be with them only in what he considered to be right and for the best interests of his constituents, and that he believed the removal of the capital was impolitic and inexpedient and would tend to clog more useful and important legislation. To further justify his position, he told his Nebraska City audience that two sessions previous he had fought long and hard to remove the capital, but upon returning to his constituents and being defeated

²¹ C. Nuckolls to Morton, January 16, 1858.

²² Morton to Nuckolls, January 21, 1858.

²³ January 23, 1858.

for re-election he had come to the conclusion that they had little interest in the question.

It will be recalled from the preceding chapter that Morton was not defeated because of his efforts to have the capital removed, but because of his opposition to the banking bills. In the light of subsequent events his real reason must be found in the statement that he believed the removal of the capital impolitic and inexpedient and would tend to clog more useful and important legislation. It is by far the better one. The territory was sadly in need of adequate legislation. The early legislatures had been so busy wrangling over the location of the capital and chartering wildcat banks that they had neglected even to provide an adequate criminal code for Nebraska and the civil law was in chaos. Even at twenty-five, Morton was too big a man to continue as a mere sectional partisan in the face of such conditions, and to such complete detriment to the territory. Likewise, he was too big a man to be content with remaining a mere sectional advocate in a territorial house of representatives.

The position to which Morton aspired was that of secretary of the territory. It was a desirable position in the new country and considered highly remunerative, paying \$2,000 a year. The secretary had control of considerable patronage and thus was in a position to fortify himself politically in the territory; and it was a good steppingstone to the position of governor. Actually, during its territorial years, Nebraska was much of the time without a governor and the secretary often served as the chief executive. Then, the position was held by Morton's bitter enemy, Thomas Cuming. The fact that getting the position would mean replacing so pronounced an opponent certainly was one of its allurements, at least in the early stages of Morton's effort to obtain the appointment.

Immediately upon the election of James Buchanan to the presidency, Morton began to press his case. The appointment of Lewis Cass, an old friend of the family in Detroit, as Secretary of State seemed to augur well for his success. Soon after the inauguration Morton went to Washington, armed with letters of introduction and recommendation from prominent men in the territory: Governor Mark W. Izard, Experience Estabrook, Fenner Ferguson, and others. E. R. Chase, with whom he had roomed at Ann Arbor, wrote from

the capital advising him to stop at Detroit and get all the papers possible addressed to General Cass; though while declaring that in his opinion the whole matter of appointments would be gone through with by the new administration, he presumed that Nebraska would be left to about the last.²⁴

The problem of appointments for Nebraska remained untouched for almost a year. Buchanan, in spite of the fact that he had succeeded a Democrat, was overwhelmed with office-seekers. From all over the country rotation in office was advocated as a cardinal Democratic principle.²⁵ The magnitude of the demands, combined with the anxious national situation, forced the President to move slowly. When Fenner Ferguson went to Washington in October to take his seat in the House of Representatives as delegate from Nebraska, he found that the President would make no appointments for the territory—not even to the vacant governorship—until the meeting of Congress.²⁶ Secretary Cuming continued to serve as acting governor until the appointment of William A. Richardson as governor. Even then it appeared that he would remain as secretary. Ferguson wrote to Morton: "I became convinced that unless Cuming misbehaved badly, he would not be removed, as the President has impliedly given him assurance to that effect."²⁷

Nevertheless, those who desired a change in the secretaryship—and there were others besides Morton—continued their efforts to have Cuming replaced. He had for some time been in poor health, and when in the winter he became seriously and irreparably ill, it was thought that a change was inevitable, and efforts were renewed.

Morton's most serious opponent was Norval E. Welch, who had moved to Omaha from Michigan a few months before. Both contenders, then, were from the same state as Lewis Cass. The Secretary of State was one of the men who had urged Morton to move to Nebraska, and it has always been thought that he received his appointment through the Cass influence. Morton's papers do not substantiate this tradition. Fenner Ferguson repeatedly maintained that Welch was the choice of Secretary Cass. On January 15, 1858,

²⁴ E. R. Chase to Morton, March 19, 1857.

²⁵ James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States, 1850-1896* (New York, 1920), I:204.

²⁶ Fenner Ferguson to Morton, January 15, 1858.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

he wrote: "Gen. Cass, as you are probably aware, is Welch's strong friend. He has so expressed himself to me . . ."

Again, on March 30, in answer to a query from Morton, Ferguson wrote:

. . . I am not *urging* the claims of Mr. Welch to the Secretaryship. When the Nebraska City folks were here they signed a letter recommending W & it was placed in my hands to send to the Secy of State. I did this, saying the signers were highly respectable, and that in my opinion Mr. Welch was a worthy young man . . . I have declined to do more than my friends in this way requested. Mr. Welch (who has been here but has left) has requested me several times to go & see the President for him, & I have declined to do so. Gen. Cass is really very anxious to have Welch appointed and as he (Gen C) has more than once laid me under obligation to him, and as he personally requested me to favor Mr. Welch, I have felt greatly embarrassed & have not felt at liberty to oppose Gen Cass' wishes; but the President & Judge Black (the atty general) both know from my own mouth that another person would be at least as acceptable to me as Mr. Welch. I told Welch the last time I saw him that he had better go and study a profession or engage in some business and work his way up rather than be seeking for an office . . .

In the same letter Ferguson declared that he did not think it proper to use Cuming's illness as an excuse to remove him, and that the President had agreed with him. Further, he said that he had urged the President to consult Governor Richardson, and, as much as possible, follow his wishes on the matter. He was not hurrying the appointment, but procrastinating to bring it out to suit the people of Nebraska and himself: ". . . I again say that I have not felt at liberty to oppose the wishes of Gen. Cass, freely expressed to me; nevertheless, I have felt authorized to use a little management, the result of which may be seen bye and bye. If Cuming lives, I have no idea the appointment will be made for a month, or even longer, but if news should be received of his death there is no telling how soon it might come off and here let me say, that in my opinion the appointment of W is at best doubtful. If he gets it, it is through Gen Cass' friendship. . . ." ²⁸

On the evening of March 30—the same day Ferguson's letter was written—news was received in Washington by telegraph from Burlington, Iowa, that Secretary Cuming had died. The very next day, Ferguson wrote Morton: ". . . I have . . . seen the atty general as I

²⁸ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1858.

told you I would, and I can now inform you that N. E. Welch will *not* be the next Secretary of Nebraska. You can rest assured of this. 'nuf ced.' "

After the death of the Secretary had actually opened up the position, numerous influential men came forward for Morton. Samuel W. Black, a justice of the Territorial Supreme Court, and later governor, was in Washington in the spring of 1858, and a mutual friend wrote Morton that he (Black) had worked hard for him there.²⁹

Governor Richardson wrote to Secretary Cass asking for Morton's appointment as Cuming's successor. "I could not do so before that event," he later said, "because it would have been construed in favour of the removal of Cuming." ³⁰

These efforts, and others, proved successful. On April 15, Ferguson was called by the President to prepare his "programme for Nebraska," and at the top of the list he wrote, "Julius Sterling Morton for Secretary," and the President sent the name to the Senate the same day.³¹ Four days later the Senate confirmed the appointment.

Doubtless, one could, if so inclined, read considerable drama into the resultant situation: Thomas Cuming dead and one of his most implacable enemies his successor in office. The rather prosaic facts, however, would not sustain the drama. It is true that Morton had fought Cuming bitterly, and that they were enemies from the time of their arrival in the territory; but this animosity must have cooled somewhat during the fourth legislature when Morton's course had thrown him with Cuming's friends. Then, too, passions flared and subsided with rapidity on the frontier. Even before Cuming's death—when it became apparent that he could not recover—Norval E. Welch had replaced him as *the* adversary in Morton's mind. When news of his confirmation reached Morton it was not a victory over Cuming—he was dead, and almost forgotten—but over Welch and other living opponents in the territory.

Though futile, perhaps, it is interesting to speculate upon what might have happened had Cuming lived. He and Morton were among the ablest men in Nebraska. Their youthful ambitions

²⁹ W. E. Moore to Morton, April 14, 1858.

³⁰ W. A. Richardson to Morton, April 22, 1858.

³¹ Fenner Ferguson to Morton, April 15, 1858.

threw them into opposition to each other, but as was beginning to be the case when they stood together against the secessionists, they might, in their more mature years, have reached the position of combining their great abilities for the good of the territory and the state. Morton had a deep respect for Cuming, and in later life often spoke in praise of him. In 1866 he lectured at Omaha for the benefit of a fund to provide a memorial to the first Secretary.³²

Morton's appointment was well received by the territorial press. The *Omaha Times* reiterated its statement of a few months before that Morton was "one of the rising men of the West," and predicted, "that the honors which have thus fallen to him will be but the stepping stone to still greater distinctions."³³ The *Cass County Sentinel* said: "... The appointment suits us first-rate—we believe Mr. Morton to be well qualified for the task, and we venture to say that the duties of Secretary will be well discharged while in his hands." The *Nebraska Republican*: "... This selection seems to give satisfaction, and we trust the new official will be all that his friends anticipate." The *Nebraska Advertiser*, usually unfriendly, was pleased because a resident of the territory had been appointed, although it stated plainly that Morton was not its first choice.

His father, who earlier had expressed deep disappointment in his son and had warned him away from politics, wrote:

I see from the News Papers that you have received the appointment of Secretary of the Territory. I congratulate you upon this, your success, and hope you may discharge the duties honorably to yourself & for the best interests of the Territory. I hope you will so conduct yourself as to retain the confidence of your friends & command the respect of your opponents. I hope in your dealings with your opponents, you will treat them with marked courtesy. . . . It may and doubtless will be consistent & just for you when opposing the principles which govern your political opponents to argue against them, but even then I think polite and chaste language will carry with it much more force & command to a greater degree respect & honor than would the more personal and abusive language usually employed by the political writers of the day . . .

One thing now Sterling, I hope you will make it a principle to attend church regularly with Cara and the children. You may depend the influence on your children will be good & continually good and it will do you good. . . .³⁴

³² *Omaha Herald*, April 27, 1866.

³³ All of these press comments were reprinted in the *Nebraska City News*, May 15, 1858.

³⁴ J. D. Morton to Morton, April 24, 1858.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SECRETARY AND ACTING GOVERNOR

J. STERLING MORTON was Secretary of the Territory of Nebraska from April 30, 1858,¹ until May 19, 1861, when Abraham Lincoln replaced him with Algernon S. Paddock. For five months of that time, or between the resignation of William A. Richardson on December 5, 1858, and the appointment of Samuel W. Black on May 2, 1859, he also was acting governor.

Morton was only twenty-six when he received the appointment, and was not unmindful that for one so young he had risen rapidly indeed. Particularly during the months in which he was acting governor as well as secretary, he was wont to compare his condition with that four years earlier, when he had left his home in Michigan, after being expelled from the University, not altogether a success. Perhaps it was with pardonable pride, that within the confines of his own family, he occasionally compared his position with that of certain of his former college mates, who earlier had been looked upon by their instructors as far his superiors. He wrote to his father:

. . . Among those recommended to me as worthy of the appointment of Notary Public & competent to fill the office creditably was Lyman Richardson, Esq. He being a very good fellow & also a *graduate of the University of Michigan*, I appointed him a Notary Public.

Things change when men are thrown out into the world to scramble for

¹ His appointment was confirmed by the Senate on April 19, but his commission did not reach him until April 30.

themselves & he whom Doct Tappan & other learned snobs diplomaed & title asks & gets place & emoluments from one whom that same Dutch Doctor Tappa. & other learned snobs considered unworthy of their benign patronage & fit onl to be crushed out of decent society as soon as possible.

Another graduate in my class, John G. Evans—one whom the Presbyterian Church of Detroit educated—one who regarded me with especial and most hol horror as a sinful & lost specimen is I learn by letter from him asking som little assistance & advice &c &c engaged in the daguerreotype business in a small town in Missouri where to use his own expressive language he "has run into th ground."

But I cherish no vengeance except to help those who hated and abused m *then*, but whom I have so far distanced that I can aford [*sic*] to be generous now. The battle of that day has been fought & with its results both in money & i honor I am content.²

Upon another occasion he wrote in his diary of a visit to Milton W. Reynolds who had succeeded him as editor of the *Nebraska City News*: "Found him nicely fixed and apparently enjoying life very much. I have done more for him than Tappans diploma."³

Soon after receiving his commission Morton went to Omaha to take over the duties of his new office. He found lodging at the "Herndon House," a newly erected hotel which for many years wa to be the center of important social functions in the territorial capital. Mrs. Morton and the boys were with him much of the time. In addition to Joy, a second son, Paul, had been born May 22, 1857 and at the Herndon, a third son, Mark, was born on November 22 1858. The young parents and their lusty offspring were popula among the residents of the hotel, who included at various time during Morton's secretaryship: Governor and Mrs. Black, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Poppleton, the O. P. Hurfords, Judge and Mrs. George W. Doane, and others prominent in Omaha circles.⁴ Morton kep a diary intermittently during the year 1859, and frequently he noted various of the many gala parties held at the Herndon. On Februar 2, George L. Miller and Lyman Richardson gave a ball to celebrate their purchase of the hotel a few days before. Morton noted that i was "the largest and best dressed assembly ever gathered togethe west of the Missouri river."⁵

² Morton to his father, December 17, 1858.

³ Diary, February 20, 1859.

⁴ Ezra Millard, "Early Life in Omaha," *Nebraska History Magazine*, VII:209.

⁵ Diary, February 2, 1859.

The residents of the Herndon House, and others, formed the territorial aristocracy—if an “aristocracy” can be said to have existed on the frontier. Many of them, like the Mortons, had come from comfortable and well-established homes in the States, and had received good educations; and they tried to transplant the refinements of their Eastern lives to frontier Nebraska. Often they were thwarted.

Frontier towns have never been said to have savored of refinement, and Omaha in the late Fifties and early Sixties was the most blustering of the booming river towns. The report that it was to become the eastern terminus of the great Pacific railroad lured men and women of all degrees of character and reputation. Saloons and bawdy houses abounded, and some of them such as the “Lone Tree” and the “Last Chance” received great notoriety. This latter was so named because it offered the last opportunity for liquid refreshment to the traveller who was going from Omaha to Council Bluffs, just across the river.

There was little respect for established procedure, and many outrages were committed. On January 10, 1859, for example, Morton recorded in his diary that upon the previous night the Omaha jail was broken into by a gang of lawless men, and two prisoners confined for horse stealing were taken to Rockport, a few miles to the north, and hanged to a tree. Threats of violence were openly made against any officer of the law who might attempt to punish those who had taken part in the lynching.

The Secretary, though his position in contemporary life was an important one, worked under physical difficulties that to a later day seem overwhelming. The new capitol, begun in 1857 to replace the little structure built by the Omaha Town Company, was of imposing design—a two-story brick building with four fronts, each with a portico of Corinthian pillars, and the whole surmounted by a beautiful observatory—but it was unfinished; and that part which had been brought to a usable state of completion was far from satisfactory. The architect had intended to have the Council and House chambers, as well as the Governor’s and Secretary’s offices, on the second floor; and the Supreme Court room, judges’ offices, committee and reading rooms on the first floor. When Morton assumed office, however, the entire functions of the territorial government were being carried out on the first floor, and even there one room

was yet unfinished. The House of Representatives met in a little room, 22'x34', originally intended for the Supreme Court; and the Council, when in session, carried on its deliberations in a room of the same size, originally intended for the territorial library. The Secretary had an office, 22'x24', but the Governor had to be content with one measuring 10'x22'. The three other finished rooms were occupied as a reading room, a committee room, and a bedroom for the night watchman.⁶

Morton was responsible to the federal government for the capitol, and many were the tribulations arising out of this obligation. The building stood on a hill exposed to the full fury of the high winds which roared across the prairie, and it had been so poorly constructed that it was in almost constant need of repair. Upon one occasion, Morton wrote the Comptroller of the Treasury: "I deem it necessary that some measure be immediately taken to prevent the south wall of the capitol building from falling out . . . It has already broken loose from the inner walls, and is only bound by the outside walls on the north and south sides of the building and they are giving away slowly. It can only be secured by iron bolts passing through the building. . . ." ⁷

At another time: "We have had an awful wind—four windows upstairs in capitol have been blown in and smashed, the North-West corner of the roof has been torn up—boards, tin, rafters, & all, about thirty feet square. . . . To repair it will cost several hundred dollars and then as long as it is unfinished it will be liable to be ripped up by the wind. . . ." ⁸

A few weeks later there was another storm, and the capitol was further damaged, this time to such an extent as to render it wholly untenable, obliging the Governor and Secretary to move their offices and equipment to rented rooms downtown.⁹

There were other matters which tried the Secretary's patience and demanded official attention. "There is great need of a privy on the grounds adjacent to the capitol building, and of a well house," Morton wrote Comptroller Medill in the spring of 1859. "The base-

⁶ Morton to William Medill, Comptroller of the Treasury, December 7, 1859.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Morton to Experience Estabrook, April 15, 1860.

⁹ Morton to Medill, June 8, 1860.

ment of the Capitol building has heretofore been used for the former, which in warm weather renders the upper part of the building unfit for use, and it has already cost as much or more for cleaning the Basement than it would require to build a privy.”¹⁰

Again, the Secretary complained that a fence was absolutely necessary about the capitol, “which now, during the warm weather as it stands upon a high and open prairie, affords almost the only shelter in a circuit of several miles, is surrounded every day by a large drove of cattle, whose presence, habits, and course generally about the East side of the building between it and town are anything but pleasant or agreeable. . . .”¹¹

In addition to the inconveniences caused by the wretched state of the capitol, there were other vexatious conditions. Americans have often been prone to consider their public officials as agents for private gain; and on the sparsely populated frontier, where the personal factor entered strongly into government, this attitude was often a matter of course. A fellow Nebraska Citian, for example, thought nothing of asking the Secretary to use his official influence to enable him to sell a few thousand “special segars” to the Herndon House, “at reduced rates.” He was a good fellow, though, and accompanied his request with an invitation to visit him in Nebraska City soon, “as the Apple Jack is getting rare and old.” Another friend wanted Morton to help collect a six dollar printing bill owed him by the clerk of the Supreme Court. As a further request, he asked: “And could you not, while you are engaged in one kind act, confer the favor of sending me a copy of the new Civil Code. Printing is become so ‘poor pay’ that I am compelled to resume the practice of law.”¹²

Morton had no sooner taken office than his extreme independence of action got him into trouble that lasted throughout his administration, and upon various occasions threatened his official demise. The root of the difficulty was the disposition of the public printing.

This was an important issue in the minds of the western pioneers.

¹⁰ April 25, 1859.

¹¹ June 30, 1859.

¹² Morton Mss.

The officials of the territories normally had about \$7,500 to expend upon printing. About \$2,500 of this usually was divided between two of the newspapers, edited by the faithful, for incidental printing; and about \$5,000 was reserved for the laws and journals. Such sums loomed large in the eyes of editors, who, if they were paid at all by their subscribers, often received little besides farm produce in return for subscriptions. The public printing could be a matter of life and death for those plaintive voices striving to make themselves heard across the empty prairie. And as they were virtually the only organs of public opinion, the issues which they espoused were looked upon as important by the people generally. Hence, the public printing was indeed an important question.

The printing funds were allocated from congressional appropriations, and the secretary, as the federal disbursing agent for the territory, was responsible for the money. It was the practice, however, for the secretary to follow the wishes of the territorial legislature in selecting the public printers. The Secretary of Kansas followed such a course,¹⁸ and Thomas B. Cuming had done likewise. The legislatures, usually well-loaded with editors, were jealous of what they assumed to be their prerogatives, and considered the right to select a public printer an important attribute of popular sovereignty. Morton, it will be recalled, as a member of the committee on public printing in the second legislature, had been an ardent defender of this aspect of the legislature's rights.

As secretary, however, Morton was determined that he, and not the legislature, was to control the public printing. Before the legislature was convened, he wrote Comptroller Medill that Secretary Cuming's habit of awarding the public printing to whomever might be selected by the legislature was "full of evils." The laws were always late, "and the persons who have printed them have as often been our political enemies as they have our friends." Under such circumstances, he declared:

. . . It therefore occurs to me that as the Democratic Party is but just organizing here, and the Legislature about to convene has a Republican and Know-Nothing majority in the lower house, that the matter of the public printing should be taken out of their hands entirely. And if you will support me in it,

¹⁸ Hugh S. Walsh, Secretary of the Territory of Kansas, to Morton, September 29, 1858.

or instruct me to do so, I will inform the Legislature at the beginning of the session that they need to elect no Public Printer, that the Printing of the laws is to be paid for not by them, but by the United States, and that the proper agent of the Government will dispose of it, and attend to it without their cooperation. If this course is not taken and a "Black Republican" editor be elected printer to the Territory it will place me in a very unpleasant predicament. . . .¹⁴

Soon after the legislature was convened the lower house passed a resolution requesting the Secretary to lay before it, "any information or instructions which he may have in his possession, relative to the payment of moneys for newspapers for the use of members, postage or public printing, and for the payment of *per diem* of the members and officers . . . of the legislature."¹⁵

The majority of the items upon which information was requested were relatively perfunctory, and Morton's statement that he would take care of them, provided in the aggregate they did not exceed the total appropriation of \$20,000, seemed to satisfy the lawmakers. When, however, he pre-emptorily quoted the Organic Act to the effect that he had control of all expenditures, including that for public printing, they hastened to disagree.

The majority of the special committee to which Morton's report was referred, declared that the Organic Act had "reference solely to the *amount* of the appropriations, and not to the object or manner of disbursing the same," and "that the subject of printing is plainly under the control of the territorial legislature, not only by express words of the several acts but by necessary implication, as being one of the incidental powers belonging to the law-making powers, and without which should the secretary of the territory at any time refuse to provide for such printing, legislation would be retarded."

A minority of two members, B. P. Rankin and William B. Hall, after considering the matter "with calmness and a desire to discover the law," came to the conclusion that the Secretary and not the House had entire control of the printing, and as an earnest of their attitude recommended that he be requested to have two thousand copies of the Governor's message printed for the use of the House.¹⁶

Disregarding completely the views of the majority, Morton appointed T. H. Robertson of the *Omaha Nebraskan*, and Thomas

¹⁴ Morton to Medill, August 13, 1858.

¹⁵ *House Journal*, Fifth Session, 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21, 27-32.

Morton of the *Nebraska City News*, "they being the oldest and most widely circulated and reliable Democratic Journals in Nebraska," as public printers for the territory.¹⁷

Robertson and Thomas Morton handled the legislature's incidental printing and it appeared that that body had tacitly acknowledged the Secretary's right in the matter. Then, two days before adjournment, the House and Council met in joint session and elected Robert W. Furnas, of Brownville, editor of the *Nebraska Advertiser*, member of the Council and bitter opponent of the Administration, as public printer.¹⁸ This appeared to the Secretary as an act of open defiance. Not only did the legislature insist that it had the prerogative of electing the printer, but it chose a man who had long been known as a hostile critic of Morton's course.

Morton wrote immediately to J. W. Denver, Governor of Kansas, asking him while in Washington, whither he was going on official business, to get a decision in his favor from Medill as soon as possible. He added: "At any rate if the Department refuses to sustain me in the position which I have taken—and thereby rules that though I am responsible for money disbursed, I shall always be governed by an irresponsible, Black Republican, nigger-loving legislature—then my resignation of the Secretaryship will be sent in. . . ." ¹⁹

The legislature's action stirred up great interest in the question. The territorial press examined it with vigor, and many letters were written to the Treasury Department either in defense or condemnation of the Secretary. The *Nebraska City News* wrote of Morton's opposition: "We congratulate Secretary Morton upon the fact that all the Black Republican organs in the Territory are after him on the printing question. Their ability for telling large lies has never been doubted for a moment by us, but truly in their libelous pursuit of Mr. Morton they have outdone even themselves. . . ." ²⁰

Regarding the situation in Washington, Bird B. Chapman, Democratic delegate-elect from Nebraska, wrote to Morton: ". . . the next day after I arrived I called on the Comptroller and had a free

¹⁷ Morton to Medill, November 1, 1858.

¹⁸ *Council Journal*, Fifth Session, 232.

¹⁹ Morton to J. W. Denver, November 2, 1858.

²⁰ November 27, 1858.

talk with him about your affairs, particularly the printing & Furnas. I found he had been much talked to by others and against you . . . I called again yesterday and examined all the papers and letters on both sides, and found letters for you *only* from Gov. Richardson, Judge Wakeley, Dr. Miller and myself . . . And I also found myself the only one in this city taking your part in the matter. . . . After reading all on both sides I then expressed myself freely & told them in addition I would put another paper on file containing my opinion more at length . . . My opinion is we shall carry the case notwithstanding all the lies." ²¹

Meanwhile Morton pursued his original course, steadfastly refusing to recognize Furnas as the public printer. On December 31, he sent manuscript copies of the laws and journals of the fifth session to Thomas Morton, even though he had no ruling from Medill, with instructions that he forward them immediately to Munsell and Roland in Albany, New York, for printing: "Let nothing delay this important matter—hurry the work on to the earliest completion possible. Take care of the indexing and proofreading above all things and push the job with all the force they can muster." ²²

Furnas, for his part, despaired of ever receiving the public printing. He complained in his paper: "We have only to say . . . that we have not as yet received the copies of laws from which to print; and, to be frank, we do not expect we will. Had former usages, to say the least, been conformed to, justice to the public printer observed, and the interests of the people of Nebraska in the slightest degree consulted, the laws passed at the late session of the general assembly would before this have been printed and delivered, not only to the secretary of the territory, but to the several counties. . . . Complaints are universal." ²³

Not during Morton's term as secretary was the printing question formally settled, but for all practical purposes it remained as it was. Morton continued, in face of a varying amount of legislative opposition, to exercise control over the printer. The Comptroller, while never giving a definite ruling, always allowed Morton's bills

²¹ B. B. Chapman to Morton, January 15, 1859.

²² Morton to Thomas Morton, December 31, 1858.

²³ *Nebraska Advertiser*, March 3, 1859.

for printing, thus giving tacit consent, at least, to his course. Though interest ebbed somewhat after Morton's initial victory, the Secretary's attitude on the printing was used by interested parties throughout his term to make trouble for him in Washington. Nevertheless, the precedent which Morton established was followed by the secretaries of Nebraska until the territory became a state.

Aside from its effect on Morton, the printing question is of interest because it served to accelerate the growing rift between the various factions of the heretofore undisputed Democratic party in Nebraska.

The friends of Furnas in Washington were claiming the public printing for him as "a democratic editor."²⁴ They alleged, however, that being a mere Democrat was not enough; and declared that his failure lay in the fact that he was not a member of the branch of his party in control of the administration. Indicative of this, Furnas printed a letter from an attorney whom he had employed to look after his interests in Washington:

I find . . . what the real difficulty is which stands in your way, and which will prevent any remedy for the injury you may have received by the conduct of the secretary is that you are an anti-Lecompton democrat, and the power and the patronage . . . is given to the few who profess to be Lecompton democrats, and in all things worship at the shrine of Mr. Buchanan. There lies the real difficulty in your case, and hence I conclude that you are without a remedy . . . I have not known such vindictive tyranny ever before practiced by any party in this country, as has been and still is practiced towards the anti-Lecompton democracy of the west. . . .²⁵

The *Nebraska City News* scoffed at the idea that true Democrats could be opposed to Morton on the printing question. That paper declared that the Secretary's opposition was made up for the most part "of the worst possible enemies of the democracy, and the democratic organization—bolters, disaffected soreheads, sleepy, Janus-faced Democrats, consistent in nothing but their persistent and diabolical opposition to the organization and success of the democratic party, at heart the blackest of black republicans, but outwardly 'people's men' and 'people's candidates,' these are the kind

²⁴ Chapman to Morton, *loc. cit.*

²⁵ *Nebraska Advertiser*, May 19, 1859.

of men who have elected a pseudo-democrat, one of their number, and one of their leaders, territorial printer.”²⁶

The disposition of the public printing was the most pressing and prolonged issue of Morton's career as secretary, but there were other problems; and though they may not have achieved the newspaper notice enjoyed by the printing question, some of them flared up with a physical immediacy which greatly overshadowed that issue.

Most important of these problems was the incipient rising of the Pawnee Indians in the summer of 1859. General J. W. Denver had been sent out from Washington to negotiate with the tribe in 1857, and had concluded a treaty with their chiefs, by which the Indians ceded all claims to their lands in eastern Nebraska.²⁷ Nevertheless, the tribe continued to be troublesome to settlers upon the territorial frontiers, especially those residing in the valleys of the Platte and Elkhorn Rivers. They stole horses, cattle, and sheep. At various times they drove off the settlers by threats of violence, then stripped their cabins of everything they could carry away.²⁸

The bad feeling between the whites and the Indians came to a head on July 2, when the Pawnees destroyed two post offices on the Elkhorn and drove off over a hundred head of cattle belonging to the settlers. In fear of their lives the settlers sent their families to the older towns for protection and petitioned the territorial government for aid.²⁹

Governor Black was in Nebraska City, where he had gone to deliver a Fourth of July oration, when the settlers' petition reached Omaha, and the responsibility fell to Morton, the ranking executive officer in the city. There was some doubt as to his legal ability to do anything more than inform the Governor, as the Organic Act

²⁶ *Nebraska City News*, November 6, 1858.

²⁷ This treaty was signed just a few miles north of the J. Sterling Morton farm, and Mr. and Mrs. Morton were present at the signing. Many years later, W. Haskell Coffin, noted American artist, was commissioned to do a painting in commemoration of the event. His painting now hangs at the head of the first flight of stairs in the mansion at Arbor Lodge State Park, Nebraska City, Nebraska. A highway marker has been erected at the spot where the treaty was signed, one and one-half miles northwest of Nebraska City on United States Highway 75.

²⁸ Morton to James Buchanan, July 4, 1859.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

provided that the secretary should assume the duties of governor only if the latter were absent from the territory; and Governor Black clearly was still in the territory. Technicalities, however, have seldom been known to impede frontier action, and Morton after a short conference with John M. Thayer, head of the territorial militia and volunteers, issued an order for him to march against the Indians. By midnight Thayer had raised forty men and was on his way.³⁰ The next afternoon he entered the settlement of Fontanelle, where he found most of the settlers from the Elkhorn valley. He organized there and raised a force of 194 men, including those whom he had brought from Omaha. Armed with rifles, provisions, and the one piece of artillery owned by the territory, they set out on the trail of the red-skinned marauders.

Meanwhile, Morton had informed Black of the trouble, and had also requested aid from Colonel Charles May, commandant at Fort Kearny. Black ordered out a company of Dragoons from Nebraska City under Lieutenant Beverly H. Robinson, and he himself returned to Omaha, whence, after raising a few more volunteers, he started in hot pursuit.³¹ Black and Robinson overtook Thayer's contingent on the fourth day out, and the entire group went on together after the Indians, whom they had heard numbered about 5,000, including women and children.

When the expedition, after all its preparation, finally came upon its prey, it found the Indians unwilling to fight. As Morton's clerk, who had accompanied the volunteers from Omaha, wrote: "They run and threw away everything they had, some took to the river and others up the same, the women to howling &c &c and Black cornered some 4 or 5 hundred of them and they were willing to say or do anything."³²

The Indians signed a treaty of peace, agreeing to pay for all the damage done the whites, and gave up six prisoners to Governor Black. On the return to Omaha these tried to escape and were shot. Soon after this difficulty the Pawnees were put upon a reservation

³⁰ John M. Thayer, "The Pawnee War of 1859," *Proceedings and Collections*, Nebraska State Historical Society (Second Series), V:233. The author's account of the expedition against the Pawnees, except where otherwise indicated, follows that of Thayer.

³¹ Morton to Buchanan, July 4, 1859.

³² A. D. Luce to Morton, June 17, 1859.

in what is now Nance County, and it is reported that they committed no more depredations.

Another difficulty, and one which threatened to be almost as serious as the trouble with the Pawnees, arose out of the abortive Nebraska "Gold Rush."

In the spring of 1859, a small quantity of gold was discovered near the headwaters of the South Platte. The territorial press seized with avidity upon the news of the discovery and for a time filled its columns with glowing accounts of the vast mineral wealth lying in the western territory, awaiting only the arrival of good men, who of course, would have purchased their outfits in one of the river towns. Letters were written to papers in the East urging all who would win huge fortunes in gold to come to Nebraska.

Morton as secretary quite naturally was enthusiastic about any development which would redound to the good of the territory, but he was not at all certain that this latest development was such a one. Hence, just as while a legislator he had attempted to stem the tide of an unsound and transitory prosperity, so as secretary he wrote to the Eastern papers warning their readers against giving up positions at home to hunt for gold. In the *Detroit Free Press* he said: "I think that for the purposes of speculation in town lots at Denver City and other Rocky Mountain villages, some men have knowingly exaggerated, while others have made statements based more upon hope than upon fact—have deceived themselves and have innocently deceived others. I do not believe that anything has been discovered up to this date in the way of gold-producing lands that will pay to work. Some gold has certainly been found, but the excitement has been created by designing speculators. . . ." ³³

Events little more than a month subsequent were to show that had all of the citizens adopted the Secretary's restraint, it would have been better for the territory. As he had been right in his opposition to wildcat banking, so now he was justified in his attitude toward the news from the gold fields. In April and May of 1859 the gold-seekers began to conclude from expensive and disheartening experience that the stories extolling the great productivity of the mines were false. Many returned empty-handed and discouraged from the

³³ March 31, 1859.

diggings, and others, meeting them, turned back before they reached their destination.

The fulsome stories of great wealth backfired in the faces of those who had published them. The disappointed miners threatened to "pillage the towns, burn & sack them, hang the letter-writers . . . and make Nebraska a land of mourning."³⁴ For a few days there was scattered fighting all up and down the Missouri. Morton was in Detroit, visiting his parents, and the clerk of his office reported that the streets of Omaha were filled with stragglers and strangers, and that in preparation for any emergency he had 100 muskets stacked in his sleeping room. At Nebraska City an excited crowd threatened to burn the *News* office and hang the editor. Reynolds was saved from this unhappy fate only by the appearance of Columbus Nuckolls with a little bag of gold claimed to have been gathered in the South Platte diggings.³⁵

During the last eighteen months of Morton's term as secretary of the territory his duties, insofar as the office was concerned, were relatively routine. The printing question had somewhat subsided, and neither the Indians nor the miners seemed disposed to cause further trouble. There were, of course, the vexations of the ill-kept capitol, and the regular rough-and-tumble of the life of a public official on the frontier, but these did little to ripple the surface of the usually calm round of activities which demanded the attention of the Secretary.

Much of the routine work connected with his office had to do with the disbursement of the federal funds appropriated for the territory. The rigid economy with which he performed this function is noteworthy. When he took possession of the Secretary's office, he found that it owed \$6,000. When he turned it over to A. S. Paddock, he was able to report that it owed nothing, save \$18 to the *Nebraska City Press* for newspapers furnished the legislators.³⁶ The magnitude of his accomplishment is not offset by the fact that appropriations for the territory were increased during his term of office, for

³⁴ Luce to Morton, May 13, 1859.

³⁵ Andreas, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, II:1203.

³⁶ Morton to Elisha Whittlesey, July 31, 1861.

the increase was not at all commensurate with the growing expense incident to the spread of settlement to the north and west.

His insistence upon economy increased the estrangement with the legislature that had resulted from his attitude on the printing. His lack of faith in either the ability or integrity of the majority of the lawmakers made him anxious to curtail their activities as much as possible. In 1858, after Governor Richardson had called the fifth legislature into a special session made necessary by the failure of the "Do Nothing" fourth session to provide either a civil or criminal code, Morton ruled that the government would only pay the expenses of one session of forty days in any one year, thus forcing the legislators to merge the special with the regular session.³⁷ He justified his action to Comptroller Medill by writing: "All necessary business can be accomplished in forty days and all attempts to have two sessions this year will result from the fact that money is scarce & the per diem is an object."³⁸

Besides (indicating the presence of the sectional issue in Nebraska politics), he noticed that the "Black Republican" House of Representatives was "reaching out from day to day after the nigger question;"³⁹ and even in one session of forty days found time to make, "an attempt to pass a law prohibiting slavery in Nebraska which was introduced for sinister purposes, and which was struck down in its incipency."⁴⁰

Some months before his term was completed, Morton began to look for new fields of activity. A number of the Democratic papers in the territory had predicted that the secretaryship would be nothing but a steppingstone to greater success, and a young man of Morton's energy and temperament was not disposed to linger too long before taking the next step. Candidacy in the race for delegate to Congress seemed to offer the best opportunity for advancement. It would enable him to transfer his activities, in a measure, to the national scene, to broaden his contacts and the scope of his life. Then, too, it would free him from the vexations connected with his administrative position. For, in addition to the fact that he had

³⁷ *House Journal*, Fifth Session, 60.

³⁸ Morton to Medill, August 24, 1858.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, October 4, 1858.

⁴⁰ Morton to Buchanan, November 15, 1858.

little with which to work, he chafed constantly at the strict surveillance of the comptroller—a scrutiny which at times assumed a picayunish aspect, and which was becoming increasingly incompatible with Morton's highly independent nature. As early as February 1860, he had thought, in disgust, of resigning.⁴¹

At the time when he had assumed the office of secretary he had declared that he “was not . . . never had been nor would . . . consent to become a candidate for Delegate,”⁴² but two years had changed his mind. In the summer of 1860 he plunged into a campaign that was destined to be one of the most heated in the territorial history of Nebraska.

⁴¹ Morton to Lewis Cass, February 9, 1860. This is a copy of a letter of resignation. Across the face of it is written: “Not sent by request of John McConihe.” McConihe was Governor Black's private secretary.

⁴² Morton to Milton W. Reynolds, April 20, 1858.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ELECTED BUT NOT SEATED

IN NEBRASKA THE CAMPAIGN of 1860 was bitter and acrimonious, possibly even more so than the one in the nation at large; and longer than at any election in the history of the territory or state the outcome on the important issue was in doubt. The vital question for Nebraska's voters was not whether Lincoln or Douglas, Breckinridge or Bell be elected President; not whether the slave power should be continued or destroyed; not whether the tariff should be raised or lowered; but who should be sent from Nebraska as delegate to Congress. The citizens of the territory could not vote in the presidential election, and the national issues held local importance simply as measuring sticks by which candidates for the congressional office might be appraised.

The Territorial Democratic Convention was held in Omaha on August 15, and on the fourth ballot J. Sterling Morton received the nomination for delegate. His strongest opponents for the nomination were Stephen Decatur, Silas Strickland, and J. F. Kinney.¹ The two latter were from Otoe County, presaging at once that county's strength in territorial Democratic councils, and the inability of the Otoe Democracy to agree on either issues or men.

Morton had been advised against allowing his name to be placed on the ticket. James Tufts, a political friend from out on the

¹ *Omaha Nebraskan*, August 18, 1860.

Niobrara, had written: "Woolworth² informs me your friends have some idea of sacrificing you for the next delegate. I replied to him touching the matter and am free to say to you that in my opinion you will lose by coming out now. The people of Nebraska are a dandily unappreciative people and until they are wiser and better no one can rely upon them. . . ."³

His father, a strong supporter of Lincoln, was sorry that his son had entered the race. "I see you are having a hot contest," he wrote. "Had I known it in time would have advised you not to run this year. It being the Presidential Election, Buchanan the most unpopular of all the Presidents, & you his appointment & he being cursed by his own party makes it a hard road to travel. Nearly all the Free States will go for the Republican candidates."⁴

Morton's opponent in the campaign was Samuel G. Daily, the incumbent. Daily had migrated to Nebraska from Indiana in 1857, bringing with him machinery for a sawmill which he set up on the banks of the Missouri River at Peru; but almost from the beginning he had devoted himself not to the lumber business but to politics. The year after his arrival he was elected a member of the territorial legislature from Nemaha County. In 1859 he took a prominent part in the organization of the Republican party in the territory, and was nominated as its first candidate for delegate to Congress. His victory over Experience Estabrook, the Democratic candidate, was contested and he was finally seated only a month before Congress adjourned, when he was forced to return to the territory to run for re-election.⁵

He had received but a limited education, and was popularly known as "Skisms Daily," because of his incorrect pronunciation of the word "schism."⁶ He was, however, fearless, energetic, and resourceful, and had a ready skill in adapting himself to any situation. He achieved a wide popularity among those of his own party, and did much to strengthen the Republican organization in the territory. Morton, never noted for his charitable opinions of adversaries, once described him thus to his father: ". . . He is a man of about 40 years

² James M. Woolworth, a young attorney, who was to become a distinguished member of the Omaha bar.

³ James Tufts to Morton, June 28, 1860.

⁴ J. D. Morton to Morton, October 9, 1860.

⁵ Morton-Watkins, I:405n.

⁶ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I:288.

of age pretty sharp, very unscrupulous, drinks lots of whiskey, gambols [*sic*] and loves niggers, is sociably rather pleasant, considered a very good stumper, storytelling he can do well. . . ."⁷

Morton realized from the beginning that his position as "Buchanan's representative" in the territory was inimical to his popular success. The people had returned a large Republican and Know-Nothing majority to the last legislature. By his veto of the Homestead Act, thus temporarily denying the settlers their fervently desired free farms, President Buchanan had made his administration thoroughly unpopular in the territory. While Morton personally had a strong following in the party, his own extreme independence as secretary did not serve to ameliorate, in the minds of the people at large, the generally unfavorable impression created by the administration's course. There was vigorous complaint that the Buchanan branch of the party, in the territory as well as the nation, ran rough-shod over the rights of others.

Robert W. Furnas, a Douglas Democrat who during the campaign shifted to Republicanism, declared that at the Omaha convention which had nominated Morton: ". . . good Douglas Democrats . . . were, as usual, thrust aside to give place to crib-fed federal office holders . . . when conventions meet, or any other political action had, the Government officials, the upholders of Buchanan, being 'clothed with a little brief authority,' domineeringly say 'we are greater than you; the party is entrusted to our keeping; stand aside,' and if a Douglas Democrat has the independence to raise a voice in opposition, he is at once set down as a disorganizer, and immediately read out of the party . . . We are very much mistaken in the people of Nebraska if they are not prepared to administer a more scathing rebuke to the Buchanan Democracy this year, than they did at the last general election."⁸

Despite the fact that the opposition claimed the convention had nominated an Administration Democrat, Morton had taken steps, even before the meeting, to remove the blight of Buchananism from his candidacy. Soon after the news of Douglas' nomination by the Baltimore convention had reached Nebraska, he had written to William A. Richardson: "I can get the nomination for Delegate to

⁷ Morton to J. D. Morton, November 10, 1860.

⁸ *Nebraska Advertiser*, August 23, 1860.

Congress and if I was sure that after obtaining it and taking the stump and declaring for Douglas, I could be removed by Mr. Buchanan, I would surely run, as my election would then be certain. Please write me and advise me . . .”⁹

Whether Richardson gave his young friend the desired advice is not known. At any rate, at the opening of the campaign, those supporting Morton announced that in spite of the fact that he held an appointment from Buchanan, he was a good Douglas Democrat, and a believer in the cause of popular sovereignty. The *Nebraska City News* carried at its masthead, above Morton's name as its candidate for delegate, those of Stephen A. Douglas and Herschel V. Johnson for president and vice president.

The Republicans recognized that if Morton could convince the people he was a Douglas Democrat, he would receive a large number of votes that would be cast against him as a Buchananite; for just as Buchanan's position on territorial problems, as demonstrated in the affair of the Lecompton Constitution, was anathema to the citizens of Nebraska, so Douglas' advocacy of the rights of the territories to self-government was highly popular with them. There was a possibility, as Morton had predicted in his letter to Richardson, that the votes of Douglas' supporters combined with those of the Democrats who would vote for him anyway, might be sufficient to elect him. Recognizing this, the Republican press struck out bitterly against Morton's pretensions to popular sovereignty. The *Nebraska Advertiser*, edited by Robert W. Furnas, the party's latest recruit, led in the fight. Furnas was especially bitter on this issue because he believed that Morton's refusal to recognize him as public printer after he had been chosen by the legislature, was an instance of particularly flamboyant disregard of the Douglas doctrine.

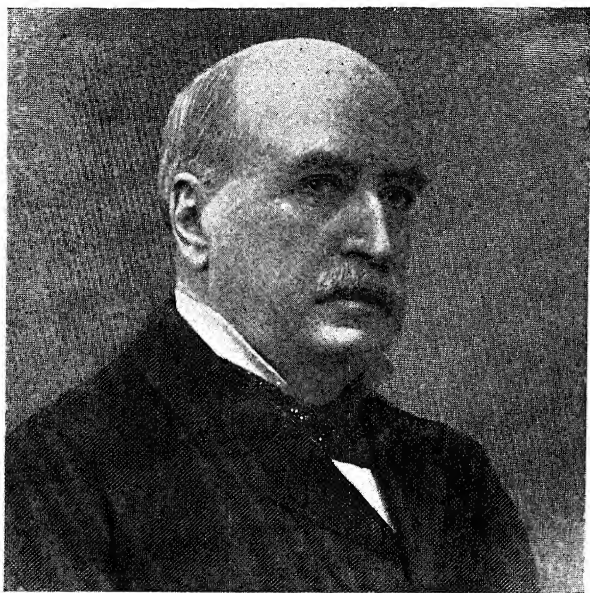
“Morton a Douglas Democrat!!” he wrote. “He who received the appointment of Secretary of this Territory from Buchanan in the very midst of that old tyrant's most bitter proscriptive course, and has continued to hold office up to the present moment . . . He, who, when the people of this Territory, as they had all along before done, through their representatives in the Legislature, selected their own Public Printer, said no, gentlemen, the Federal authority, whose

⁹ Morton to W. A. Richardson, July 11, 1860.



IN WASHINGTON
1862

J. STERLING MORTON
DANIEL W. VOORHEES WILLIAM A. RICHARDSON



GEORGE
L.
MILLER



ROBERT
W.
FURNAS

"TWO LIFE-LONG FRIENDS"

agent I am, will control this matter; you've nothing to do with it, 'I run this machine'—'I own this show!' and 'THE LEGISLATURE MAY GO TO H—L; I am not responsible to it for my actions.' He a popular Sovereignty man!!! . . ." ¹⁰

Buchanan's failure to remove Morton after the latter had declared for Douglas was used to advantage by his opponents. The *Advertiser* ran a series of articles inquiring into the validity of Morton's position as a Douglas Democrat. The burden of these was a constant reiteration of the fact that Morton could not possibly be a Douglas Democrat because he "held this man Buchanan's Commission as Secretary worth \$2,000."

The Republicans sensed that they had found a vulnerable spot in their opponent's armor, and they struck at it with intensity. Although Morton's convincing oratory and facile friendliness were a rather effective shield against the Republican attacks, actually Furnas and his friends were correct in doubting the completeness of Morton's espousal of Douglas. For after the campaign was over, he was able to write President Buchanan: ". . . Congratulating you Sir! upon the deliberative, but determined course which your good judgment has prompted, and your patriotism as well as that of every other American citizen endorsed during the past few months of great trial to our country, and hoping you may live long and soon witness an entire vindication of the policy of your Administration throughout." ¹¹

Before the advent of rapid communication, a favorite technique in the conduct of a political campaign was the holding of a series of debates between the opposing candidates at various places throughout their electoral area. This method was used by Morton and Daily in 1860, and during most of the month of September the two men canvassed the territory together. They opened their debates at Omaha, then went down into the South Platte counties, and concluded by canvassing the important towns north of the river. Often the men travelled in the same buggy, being pulled by a team made up of a horse belonging to each of them. Accommodations were hard to find and occasionally the rivals were forced to sleep in the same bed. Their debates were the major feature of the canvass and were

¹⁰ *Nebraska Advertiser*, August 23, 1860.

¹¹ Morton to Buchanan, January 17, 1861.

followed avidly by the territorial press, with each correspondent seeking to add to his favorite candidate's triumphs in debate through the magic of his own pen. Indeed, it often is difficult to tell from the various accounts that they were chronicling the same event. Two reports of the debate at Rulo, in the southeastern part of the territory, are illustrative.

A. D. Kirk, the mayor of the village, covering the debate for the *Nebraska City News*, wrote: ". . . Daily done well considering the ground he occupied. The greatest enthusiasm prevailed in favor of Morton, who is more than a match for Daily. Everybody here is for Morton now. Daily's only friend here after speaking, was a gentleman brought here by him from Falls City. Democracy is in the ascendant in Richardson County, and with such a champion as J. Sterling Morton we feel certain of a glorious triumph on the 9th of October next. . . ." ¹²

The *Nebraska Advertiser's* correspondent, who thought to convince his readers by signing his report, "A Democrat," was quick to explain away Morton's apparent success at Rulo. He admitted that Morton had won the enthusiasm of the crowd, but asked: ". . . who are the crowd? Who are they that worship Morton?" and answered: "Here, at Rulo, it is a whiskey-drinking sottish population—men or things whose god is the bottle, and whose aspirations ascend not above the most contemptible obscenity. . . ." ¹³

The best qualification for a delegate, in the minds of many, seemed to be the ability to get the most of federal largesse for his constituents. In this regard, Morton was able to take the offensive as Daily's record was against him. The latter had spent so much time contesting his seat that he had had little left for furthering the interests of the territory. This was looked upon by the Democratic press not as the result of a want of time, but as the result of the incumbent's cupidity and lack of ability. The *Huntsman's Echo*, "Independent in Everything—Neutral in Nothing," charged that Daily was "a fifth rate lawyer who by the closest scheming obtained his seat . . . just in time to defeat a handsome appropriation for public improvements in our territory. . . ." ¹⁴

¹² *Nebraska City News*, September 29, 1860.

¹³ *Nebraska Advertiser*, September 27, 1860.

¹⁴ September 13, 1860.

The *Nebraska City News* declared that Daily had failed to work for federal appropriations because he was unwilling that the Democratic territorial officers should have the right to disburse the money.¹⁵ The *Omaha Nebraskan* warned "every squatter" to bear in mind, "that the only chance to procure an appropriation to complete the capitol, to build a penitentiary, a grant of lands for railroad purposes, appropriations for bridging the Platte and the Loup Fork, appropriations for building roads . . . lies in the election of Mr. Morton. . . ." ¹⁶

The Republicans in turn charged that Morton was against free homesteads, and used as a basis for their claim the fact that while a member of the legislature he had voted against a bill to exempt homesteads from forced sales.¹⁷ President Buchanan's veto also was urged as a reason why Morton should not be elected. On this point, however, the Democrats retorted that Douglas had been in favor of the bill. Morton always opposed the granting of free homesteads, and always believed that the law of 1862 was detrimental to the best interests of the West. His opposition to homesteads in 1860—although he did not advertise it as freely as he might have in later years had it been an issue—probably cost him many votes.

After the campaign had closed and the votes had been counted, Morton was declared elected by a vote of 2,957 to 2,943—a majority of just fourteen. He had no sooner been granted his certificate by the Governor than Daily filed notice that he was going to contest the results of the election.

It was not unusual that the campaign for delegate from Nebraska should end in a contest. It would have been strange had it been otherwise, for the results of every campaign but the first one had been actively disputed. As Robert W. Furnas observed: "One great reason why so little has heretofore been secured for Nebraska is that she has never yet had a delegate so situated that he could work for

¹⁵ August 25, 1860.

¹⁶ August 18, 1860. These claims are interesting in view of Morton's later uncompromising opposition to public works.

¹⁷ *Nebraska Advertiser*, October 4, 1860.

the territory; he has always devoted the most of his time to watching and defending his seat.”¹⁸

The letter in which Daily gave notice of contest was a comprehensive denunciation of the manner in which the vote had been canvassed. He made twelve specific charges of fraud and irregularity.¹⁹ Morton, in a characteristically vigorous reply, denied, “specifically and particularly each and every statement, allegation, and charge,” and rested his right to the seat on the returns made to the Governor and duly canvassed and allowed by the board of canvassers. Not content with this, he countered his opponent’s dozen charges of fraud and irregularity with seventeen of his own.²⁰

Morton appointed A. J. Poppleton of Omaha, his boyhood chum and life-long friend, to look after his interests. Attorneys for Daily were Alfred Conkling and William F. Sapp. In the time between the election and the convening of the Thirty-Seventh Congress, these men went around the territory collecting testimony on behalf of their respective clients. Their method of procedure seems to have been highly irregular. At times both sides were represented when testimony was taken; at others, only one. The attorneys were industrious and they found many men willing to testify. When they had completed their work they had piled up evidence enough to fill a volume of 161 conflicting, confusing pages.²¹ In addition, the case was discussed at length on the floor of the House of Representatives, consuming altogether over two full days in the critical first years of the Civil War. A summary treatment, based upon a thorough study of all the available evidence, may help to clear up this long-disputed passage of the history of Nebraska.

Highlighting the offensives of both the delegate-elect and the contestant was the charge of fraud. The territorial politician was invariably suspicious of the regard in which his opponents held the sanctity of the ballot box. Unfortunately, as often as not his suspicions were well founded. The charge of fraud was frequently made, and frequently proved.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, November 17, 1859.

¹⁹ Samuel G. Daily to Morton, November 2, 1860.

²⁰ Morton to Daily, December 5, 1860.

²¹ 37th Congress, First Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 4.

Daily built his case around the allegedly fraudulent returns from the Northern Precinct of L'Eau Qui Court County. The precinct had returned 122 votes for Morton and none for Daily, a majority so overwhelming that it could not be under any circumstances anything but suspect. Further, Daily had other good reasons for doubting the veracity of the returns. The county, located in the northern part of the territory just across the river from Dakota, was known to be sparsely settled, and before the election the Northern Precinct would have been judged by no one as capable of returning a hundred votes. Moreover, two years before, in his contest with Experience Estabrook, Daily had proven fraudulent the Democratic returns from the county, and on that basis had been given his seat.

Several men were brought to Omaha to testify in Daily's behalf. The substance of their testimony was: that there were not five men living in the precinct; that about forty men from outside the precinct, whites, Indians, and half-breeds, were present at the cabin which served as polling place on the day of the election; that many of them, including the Indians (who were prohibited from taking any part in a legal election), voted more than once; and that during the entire day order and decorum were menaced by the presence of large quantities of free whiskey, generously supplied to all who desired it, and especially to the Indians.

After having thus testified, and seemingly established without a doubt the presence of fraud, the witnesses under questioning from A. J. Poppleton confessed that they had been paid to testify as they did.²²

The cross-examination further revealed that at least two of the witnesses had partaken so generously of the free liquor that they were not sure just what did happen; and one of them, who was a judge of the election, could not even remember the names of those who served with him on the board.²³

The value of testimony thus impeached is at best questionable. Even so, it probably was basically correct. That there were irregularities, fraudulent in nature, is disclosed in letters written to Morton by various of his friends, describing what took place in the Northern Precinct on election day. It should be borne in mind, how-

²² *Ibid.*, 7-12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18-26.

ever, that this evidence was not available at the time the contest was being considered before the House, and that Morton had no knowledge of what transpired until after the election.

A friend from Dakota City wrote a "friendly warning" that there were not more than thirty-five men in the precinct on election day.²⁴ Colonel A. H. Redfield wrote from the Yankton Indian Agency in Dakota: ". . . All I can say about the election across the river is this. There was a large vote there. Some of the voters I suppose were at work for me at the time but where any of the voters actually resided at the time I don't know. I do not think from all I can learn that there was any double voting—there was I have no doubt illegality, but has there not been much more of the same on the other side of the question at other places. . . ." ²⁵

Daily also charged fraud in the precincts of Rulo, St. Stephen, and Arago in Richardson County. The most important witness was Elmer S. Dundy of Falls City, who during part of the time acted as an attorney for Daily in that town and who later was a federal district judge. His testimony, though accepted by the House committee on elections, was impeached by the fact that he was attorney as well as witness, and by six men who swore that his reputation was "not very good," and that they would not believe him under oath.²⁶ Further, Dundy himself, while proclaiming the fraudulent practices in Rulo, admitted that he had not been there since the previous spring, because he understood "that one or two persons threatened to shoot" him.²⁷

It was declared that in Arago gifts of money were used by Morton's friends to persuade a number of Dutchmen recently settled there to vote for him.²⁸ This was frequently a condoned offense in early territorial politics, and was a method rather freely used by most candidates who could get the money, especially in constituencies made up largely of recent immigrants. In a time and country where it was not unusual to resort to gunfire to make a point, little was

²⁴ Daniel McLaughlin to Morton, November 4, 1860.

²⁵ A. H. Redfield to Morton, December 6, 1860. He added: "We are all Democrats here & if in the mighty storm which seems approaching it should be necessary to fight or hang a few niggerites, a lot of good soldiers would be found on the upper Missouri."

²⁶ 37th Congress, First Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 4, 131-140.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

thought, except for purposes of political capital, of using a few well-placed dollars to convince some unlettered immigrant just where his interest lay. There is strong evidence that Morton's friends did resort to this practice in Arago. Hannibal Nuckolls, a member of the prominent Nebraska family, wrote him shortly after the election: "While you was in our county you said to me if I could use any money to your advantage to do so. I did not at that time think I could do anything unless at Arago. But I found by using some money that I could carry it for you and I expended \$140 in doing so, that is to say I bought the dutch and expended that amount in cash. . . ." ²⁹

For his part, Morton alleged fraud by Daily's supporters in seven different precincts. The most flagrant of these abuses and the one in which there is the most convincing evidence was perpetrated in Falls City in the southeastern corner of the territory. Falls City returned a majority for Daily of 104 to 19. This majority Morton declared was brought about "by bribery and offers of money on the part of the partisan friends of . . . Daily, and by itinerant abolition emissaries and negro thieves, who make their headquarters and chief place of rendezvous in and about . . . Falls City." ³⁰

Democrats always looked with suspicion upon the political activities of the residents of Falls City. It had long been a station on the Underground Railroad, and was a favorite hangout for men like Jim Lane and his Kansas border ruffians. That there were malpractices in the election of 1860, there can be little doubt. The ballot box was left, unlocked, in the house of one of Daily's friends overnight, and according to the testimony of Morton's single supporter on the election board, was tampered with. Furthermore, this man declared that many votes cast for Morton were disallowed by the judges with no grounds whatsoever.³¹

When the case was being discussed on the floor of the House, Warren B. Noble of Ohio said that the man with whom the ballot box was left was originally from his district, and that he would "neither be believed on oath nor entrusted with anything," and that about this man he could "relate instances of fraud above everything

²⁹ H. Nuckolls to Morton, October 18, 1860.

³⁰ Morton to Daily, December 5, 1860.

³¹ 37th Congress, First Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 4, 135-137.

. . . [he] ever knew during an active practice of law for twenty years.”³²

Another instance in which Morton asserted that there was strong evidence of fraud was in Daily's home precinct of Peru, in Nemaha County. The election in Peru was conducted in the most irregular manner. Every election board was required by territorial law to list the names of the voters on the poll book. In Peru this was not done, and there was no way to account for the unusually large vote cast in the precinct. Also, reliable witnesses swore that seven illegal votes were admitted by judges who knew them to be illegal, all for Daily.³³

It is probable that in Omaha the same practice was followed by Daily's adherents as had been by Morton's in Arago, although the citizens of Omaha do not seem to have held their votes so dear as did the thrifty Dutchmen of Richardson County. One Timothy Kelly testified that he had been offered a dollar for every vote that he could prove he got for Daily. The sheriff of Douglas County confessed that he had spent about fifteen dollars in Daily's interest on election day, though he declared that it was paid only “to treat the boys.”³⁴

In addition to the three instances recorded above, Morton charged fraud in Pawnee County; Bellevue Precinct in Sarpy County; Kelly Precinct in Douglas County; and Fremont Precinct in Dodge County. It is possible that these charges were as correct as the others had been but there was little positive evidence brought in support of them. It may be that Morton's exuberant youthfulness had caused him to make charges on grounds of only the faintest suspicion.

The contestant and the delegate-elect did not confine themselves to the actual frauds perpetrated by the opposing party. Each was concerned with technical irregularities in the various returns. Daily alleged that he found such irregularities in virtually every county that returned a sizeable majority for Morton, and Morton could find reasons for throwing out the returns from almost all of the counties voting heavily for Daily.

Both were concerned with votes allegedly cast by nonresidents in the various precincts. Daily offered testimony to the effect that

³² *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, Second Session, 1196.

³³ 37th Congress, First Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 4, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 97, 102.

twenty-one nonresidents voted in Monroe Precinct, Platte County, eighteen for Morton and three for himself. It was admitted, however, that when these men were challenged at the polls they swore in their votes and had them accepted by the judges of the election. Furthermore, it was admitted that some of the men might have been in the precinct the required twenty days.³⁵ Daily also charged that nonresidents had voted in Omaha, but he brought no evidence to support his allegation. Morton made the more serious charge that nonresidents of the territory had voted in Dakota, Dixon, and Cedar counties, all for Daily.³⁶ But like Daily in regard to Omaha, he brought no evidence to support his claim.

Both wanted disallowed the votes of certain counties which they alleged were unorganized at the time of the election, or in which proper notice of the election had not been given, or from which the returns were submitted in an improper manner. Daily charged nonorganization or improper notice in Jones, Buffalo, Kearney, and Shorter counties. Official territorial records³⁷ show that Kearney County was organized and officers chosen on March 30, 1860. There is no statement in the official records regarding the organization of Buffalo County, but Morton was able to show county documents which gave proof that provision had been made by the officials of Buffalo County on August 28, 1860, for the election to be held October 9.³⁸ Further, Governor Black testified that the county was organized at the time of the election.³⁹ Shorter and Jones counties have since been incorporated into other jurisdictions, and there is no official record which shows just when they were organized under their old names.

Morton alleged that Pawnee, Gage, and Hall counties were unorganized at the time of the election, but his statement is refuted by official evidence, kept at the time in his own office, which shows that all three counties were organized before 1860. More telling was his charge that improper returns had been submitted from Clay, Dodge, Cass, Johnston, Lancaster, Nemaha, and Washington counties. He

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-53.

³⁶ Morton to Daily, December 5, 1860.

³⁷ Now in the office of the Secretary of State, Lincoln, Nebraska.

³⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, Second Session, 2003.

³⁹ House Miscellaneous Document No. 4, 65.

made this claim because the returns were not accompanied by abstracts of the votes as the law required.

Among the miscellaneous charges was one brought by Daily declaring that the vote of the so-called "Half Breed Tract" in Richardson and Nemaha counties should be thrown out, because the persons residing there were not entitled to vote. This was one of the weakest of Daily's attempts to overthrow the decision of the canvassing board. The residents of the district had been represented for several terms in the legislative assembly, had held county offices, sat upon juries, and paid taxes the same as any other citizens of the territory. Daily himself had campaigned for votes in the district. As Morton said: "He certainly would not have solicited the suffrages of men whom he considered as having no legal right to vote, and I am almost certain that he never would have doubted their qualifications as electors, except for the fact that they forgot to exercise them in a manner favorable and satisfactory to him. . . ." ⁴⁰

Finally, Morton held that the returns from Delaware and Syracuse precincts in Otoe County should be disallowed because the polls closed too early to permit all of the citizens to vote. He presented sworn statements in support of his position.

From the conflicting welter of available evidence, redundant on some points, woefully lacking on others, it is impossible to determine exactly just what votes should, on the basis of law and fairness, have been disallowed, and what ones should have been left standing. From the evidence that is available, however, one comes to the conclusion that Morton's majority of the honest and regularly canvassed votes was greater than that furnished him by the entire vote of the territory.

Those precincts in which there definitely appears to have been fraud were the Northern Precinct of L'Eau Qui Court County; Arago and Falls City in Richardson County; Peru in Nemaha County; and Omaha in Douglas. Even though fraudulent practices were common in territorial elections, it is not difficult to know how to dispose of the returns from those precincts in which fraud was proved. The entire vote, of course, should be disallowed. Regarding irregularities, however, an equitable solution is not so simple. Customary

⁴⁰ *Congressional Globe, loc. cit.*

practice failing to correspond with the letter of the law was not unheard of in pioneer communities. Information was not widespread. In many instances local groups had to do the best they could under circumstances of imperfect knowledge. These facts make it difficult to determine the weight that should be given an irregularity. However, except in instances in which it could be proved that extra-legal practice was a custom of long standing, it seems best to follow the letter of the law, and disallow all votes irregularly cast or returned. On this basis the votes of Jones and Shorter counties should be disallowed because there is no proof that they were properly organized at the time of the election. The votes of Nemaha, Clay, Dodge, Cass, Johnston, Lancaster, and Washington counties likewise should be discounted because they were not returned in a proper manner. The votes from Syracuse and Delaware precincts in Otoe County should not be admitted because it was proved that the polls were illegally closed. Finally, the nonresident vote in Monroe Precinct, Platte County, should be disallowed.

On the basis of the foregoing, Daily should have subtracted from his total 1,373 votes; Morton should have 1,010 deducted. This would give Morton a total of 1,947 regularly cast, honest votes; and Daily a total of 1,570 votes of the same nature. Thus Morton, instead of being elected by a majority of 14, received a majority of 377.

The author does not pretend that this computation is completely accurate. Under conditions of such imperfect information it is impossible to achieve complete accuracy. The author does maintain, however, that had the election been probed completely and fairly, Morton undoubtedly would have been given his seat as delegate to the House of Representatives in the Thirty-Seventh Congress. The manner in which he was treated by the House shows that there was no disposition to be fair and complete.

Armed with his certificate of election, Morton arrived in Washington the first of July to attend the special session of Congress called by President Lincoln. He knew he would not be seated without a battle. Daily had once before successfully contested the election of a Democrat. In the new House, the Republicans by virtue

of the withdrawal of representatives from eleven Southern states would have a strong majority. A Civil War was raging. It was no time for a minority representative from a frontier territory to expect calm and deliberative justice from the majority. Even so, Morton was hardly prepared for what he found.

Upon presenting his certificate, he discovered that his opponent already had presented a similar document and had had his name engrossed upon the roll of the House. Governor Black, it appeared, had repented of his earlier action, and on April 29, 1861, had given Daily a certificate of election, in the same instrument revoking Morton's right to his seat. The Governor had engaged in this extraordinary transaction without consulting the other members of the territorial canvassing board, and without in any way making known his action.⁴¹ Despite Democratic protests, Daily was sworn in on the basis of his certificate, and Morton, who had been conducting the case as delegate-elect, suddenly found himself in the altogether different position of contestant.

The time of the special session was largely taken up with emergency war measures. Congress was faced with a three-months old war; it had to be recognized by the passage of a special law declaring an "insurrection" to exist. The disaster at Bull Run, seventeen days after Congress was convened, caused grave doubts and an intense flurry of legislation. The men from the border states had to be appeased; and on the day after Manassas, resolutions were passed which declared this was not a war on slavery, but only on disunion.⁴² The happy illusion of a three months' war had been swept away, and it was necessary to make provision for a war of three years, even longer. It is little wonder that in the special session the House found no time to consider the contested election of the delegate from Nebraska.

It was not until May 6, 1862, that Chairman Dawes of the committee on elections called the case up for discussion on the floor of the House. Debate lasted that day and all of the next. Morton was allowed to occupy a seat on the floor and to take part in the discussion. This gave him an opportunity to defend his interests orally at least. In addition, he was supported by a number of the

⁴¹ *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, First Session, 1978.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 222-223.

ablest men in the House, including William A. Richardson of Illinois, Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana, George H. Pendleton and Clement L. Vallandigham of Ohio. Richardson, who, as Governor of Nebraska, had come to know Morton well, declared to his colleagues: ". . . I will say of him that, of all the young men in the country, and I am familiar with a very great many of them, he has the greatest intellect and the most future. I pass this compliment upon him. I have known him for years, and I have watched him well. Beyond the Ohio River there is not a brighter intellect. Gentlemen, you will hear of him hereafter; mark my words."⁴³

Both sides rehashed at length the testimony collected by the contestants. Their congressional partisans seemed as little inclined to credit evidence in favor of the opposition as had their adherents in the territory. The only new feature of the argument in the House centered about the certificate upon which Daily had been given his seat.

Voorhees presented an affidavit from Andrew W. Pentland, a relative of Governor Black, which cast serious doubt upon the validity of Daily's certificate. Pentland swore that he had copied the certificate at Black's residence in Nebraska City, in the presence of Daily and Black. He had done this in May 1861, after Alvin Saunders had replaced Black as governor. Black signed the certificate after sticking upon it the seal of the territory, and making the document appear to have been issued on an earlier date by the Governor in his executive capacity.⁴⁴

The next day it appeared that all of the sting was to be taken out of the Pentland affidavit, for Daily was able to present another one in which Pentland declared that he had signed the first "without much reflection," and that he had "not . . . the least doubt" that the certificate of election was "made and delivered by Governor Black in good faith in his official capacity." He was sure that the certificate had been issued before Governor Saunders had qualified and he declared further that he copied it only because "the original . . . was in Governor Black's handwriting, and was not very legible, and the paper was rumped."⁴⁵

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1978.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2009.

Whether or not it had any bearing upon Pentland's anxiety to correct the impression left by his first statement, Richardson read a letter from Caleb Smith, Secretary of the Interior, which stated that Pentland, upon the recommendation of Daily, had received a clerical job in the General Land Office.⁴⁶

Though Morton had recommended Black's appointment as governor, and Black while a territorial judge had worked for Morton's appointment as secretary, the two men did not get along well during their administrations and had become increasingly distant toward each other. Black did not approve of Morton's advocacy of Douglas during the campaign, and had made very little effort in his behalf. It was reported that in the few speeches which he had made he had spent his time praising Buchanan, and of Morton had said only: "I indorse Mr. Morton as the candidate of the party, although he is not such a Democrat as I can heartily support."⁴⁷

Aside from their political differences, Morton and Black had become estranged over money matters. Morton had lent the Governor "several hundred dollars," to be returned "in a few days." When Black did not pay, legal proceedings had been instituted to collect the money. Oliver P. Mason, Morton's attorney in the litigation and later Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court, wrote that "Gov. was very indignant not at me but at Morton. Would have a settlement with Morton &c &c." ⁴⁸

Morton declared that Black had issued the second certificate, because, on account of the suit, he "hated and desired to injure" him.⁴⁹

Morton's champions in the House made an able case against Daily's certificate. Richardson declared: "Judge Black assumes to decide what belongs to this House, and to this House alone. Without a recount of votes, he overturns the decision of the canvassers who by law were entitled to count the votes. I will not comment upon the fact that, by the organic law, Samuel W. Black, as Governor of the territory, was bound to send what ever official act he did to the secretary's office to be recorded. This act was never sent there. . . ." ⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1996.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1997.

⁴⁸ O. P. Mason to Morton, March 18, 1861.

⁴⁹ *Loc. cit.*, 2001.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

Voorhees said that the certificate bore upon its face the evidence of forgery, because the seal clearly was stuck on with a finger and not by the legal stamp. He asked the members of the House to "consider well whether they are willing to dignify this kind of title into an equality with their own"⁵¹

It was evident, however, that the authenticity of the second certificate could be impugned until adjournment without having any effect upon the minds of the majority. Chairman Dawes arbitrarily maintained that the validity of the two certificates was not in question, though he was forced to admit that he believed the House had acted incorrectly in seating Daily in the first place. Nevertheless, it was not the committee's duty, in his opinion, to consider the question once it had been decided.

The committee had reported that 199 of Morton's votes should be disallowed. They reached this number by adding the votes he received in the Northern Precinct of L'Eau Qui Court County, Monroe Precinct of Platte County; Buffalo County, and the Rulo Precinct of Richardson County.⁵² They had not concerned themselves at all with the votes which should have been subtracted from Daily's total, although it had been admitted by his witnesses that some of the votes cast by nonresidents in Monroe were cast for Daily, and the returns from Buffalo County which had been disqualified on the grounds of nonorganization, contained votes for Daily.

The committee insisted that the case should be decided upon these grounds alone.

Morton, even before the debate began, felt that he had only the slightest chance of success. In his annual birthday letter to his mother, he wrote: ". . . But really I cannot write dreamily today nor well for I am cudgeling my poor brains nearly to death in the vain endeavor to find out some argument or scheme through, or by, which I shall secure my seat—to which I have been honestly elected. . . . I have some little hope, very little though, that by the argument which I shall make in the House of Representatives I shall convince some members of even so blind and bigoted a party as the abolition

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1977.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1973.

Republican party is that the Law & justice both garuntee [*sic*] me my seat. . . ." ⁵³

Though it was evident all during the discussion that Morton had no chance of being seated, late in the afternoon of May 7, Daily, seemingly wishing to clinch the matter, brought the charge of disloyalty against his opponent. He reported in the House that he had a letter from a man named Blackman, living in Nebraska City, which said "that Morton's sympathy with the southern traitors is known and read of all men, and that he is sorry to say that he voted for him as Delegate." Mr. Daily added: "Mr. Blackman is now a captain in the Union Army. He has taken the other shoot."

Morton answered the charge by saying it was one he had not expected to hear "either upon this floor or anywhere else." He made his position clear:

. . . I have simply to say this, that towards the close of the Thirty-Sixth Congress, when the nation itself seemed in the convulsions of dissolution, when amid the roar and din of assembling armies, I heard the voice of the venerable gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. Crittenden) sounding calmly and grandly over and above all the terrible tumult, saying unto the waves of sectional strife, "Peace, peace, be still," I caught the words and echoed them even upon the far-off prairies of Nebraska. If that may have been disloyalty, then I am disloyal; if that may have been treason, I am proud to be called a traitor—a Crittenden traitor.⁵⁴

A few moments later he said that the charge of disloyalty reminded him of the practice of a quack doctor of medicine who, whenever he found a patient whose disease baffled his skill was in the habit of trying to throw his unhappy subject into fits, saying that if he could only succeed in producing them he might save him, for his practice on fits was terribly effective: "So now, many quack doctors in politics, when they meet with an argument from an opponent which they are unable to answer, endeavor at once to throw their subject into 'treason' or 'disloyalty,' for upon that disease their practice is considered by themselves fearfully successful. Perhaps my name may be added to the long list of unfortunates who have been doctored for this assumed disorder."⁵⁵

⁵³ April 22, 1862.

⁵⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, Second Session, 2007.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2009.

Whatever effect the charge of disloyalty might have had—and it was a potent one—the case was brought to a close a short time after it was presented. Washburne, of Massachusetts, offered a motion that the whole matter be permanently tabled, thus freeing the House of the difficulty, and giving Daily the right to keep his seat. The motion passed 69 to 38, with party lines being adhered to almost without exception. No regular Democrats voted for Daily, but six Republicans joined with the Democrats and “Unionists” in supporting Morton. They were: Frederick A. Conkling, Delano, Johnson, Killinger, Sheffield, and Train.⁵⁶

Thus the case was settled. Morton was granted the consolation of being allowed pay and mileage for the first session, and he had been allowed to take a place on the floor of the House while the case was being considered.

Perhaps that was all a Democrat should have expected in 1862.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER NINE

A NORTHERN DEMOCRAT IN THE CIVIL WAR

FEW AMERICAN MEN OF POLITICS have played more difficult, or more soul-trying roles than did the Democrats of the North during the Civil War. In the midst of their long battle against those whom they called the "Abolition Traitors" of the North,¹ they were confronted in 1861 by the presence of traitors within their own ranks—the secessionists of the South.

The willful action of their Southern brethren made almost untenable the position of the Northern Democracy. Forced by the necessity of preserving the Union to make common cause with the Republicans against their former partisans, they refused nevertheless to forget their differences with the radical elements of that party. Inasmuch as the Republican Party was the one in power, this refusal on the part of the Northern Democrats came to be publicized as second in iniquity only to the act of secession itself. Moreover, it was easy to reason that because the Southerners who were attempting to destroy the Union were Democrats, all Democrats were disunionists and disloyal.

In the Republican view, the conservative Democrats of the North merited all the opprobrium that could be heaped upon them, because by their refusal to surrender politics to the cause of unity against the common enemy, they were actually giving aid and comfort to that enemy. The Democrats, refusing to disband the interests

¹ See William A. Richardson's speech in the Democratic Convention held at Charleston, 1860.

of party, maintained that the principles of the Democracy were as valid in war as in peace, and an absolute necessity in order "to maintain the Consitution as it is, and to restore the Union as it was," which they held was the only justifiable end for which they could be struggling. To maintain the Constitution was to adhere to the rights of the states and the liberties of the citizens, "to the very principles and policy which the Democratic Party has professed for more than half a century." To restore the Union was to crush out sectionalism north and south. It would be possible for armies to break the power of the Confederate government, but the work of restoration could be carried to completion only through the use of the ballot. A beginning in the work of restoration through the ballot could be made if abolition were destroyed: "The bitter waters of secession flowed first and are fed still from the unclean fountain of abolition. That fountain must be dried up" ²

Only the Democracy, they argued, offered hope for maintenance of the Constitution and restoration of the Union. Hence, Democrats could do no other than to continue political action based on the time-honored and time-proven principles for which they held the party had always stood.

However sound or illusory their belief may have been, however much or little they merited the opprobrium and the vilification heaped upon them, and without inquiring into their motives, the fact remains that these men kept the Democratic Party alive through the most trying period in all its history, and furnished an organization around which it was possible to develop effective opposition to the post-war excesses of the Republican Party.

Democratic opposition to the war was primarily of western origin. Of the fourteen congressmen who signed the "Democratic Address," eleven were from states north and west of the Ohio River.³ As a

² "Address of Democratic members of the House of Representatives of the United States, to the Democracy of the United States, May 8, 1862." *Speeches, Arguments, Addresses, and Letters of Clement L. Vallandigham* (New York, 1864), 362-369.

³ "Democratic Address," *loc. cit.*, 362. The signatories were: William A. Richardson, Anthony L. Knapp, and James C. Robinson of Illinois; John Law, and Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana; William Allen, Clifton A. White, Warren P. Noble, George H. Pendleton, and Clement L. Vallandigham of Ohio; Nehemiah Perry of New Jersey; Philip Johnson, and Sydenham E. Ancona, of Pennsylvania; and George K. Shiel of Oregon.

young Democrat from a Western territory, firm in his attachment to the principles of the party, and anxious to forge ahead within it, J. Sterling Morton might well have been expected to look to these men for leadership. This is even more natural when it is considered that the men who were assuming leadership in the party were the same ones who had espoused his cause against Daily in the House of Representatives—Richardson, Voorhees, Noble, Pendleton, and Vallandigham. Indeed, these men were formulating their address to the party during the time that they were making their vigorous but futile effort to have Morton seated. His case was finally disposed of on May 7, 1862, and the "Democratic Address" was issued on May 8.

These older and more experienced politicians cordially welcomed the brilliant young man from Nebraska into their councils. Richardson, who had worked with him in the territory, could vouch for him when he arrived; after a short acquaintance, his winning personality and native ability spoke for themselves.

While in Washington, Morton took part in the work of drawing up the "Address," and though his failure to gain his seat prevented him from signing it as a member of the House, Clement L. Vallandigham, who generally is recognized as the primary author, acknowledged that Morton had done good service in its preparation.⁴

Throughout the entire war, Morton maintained the closest friendship with the leading anti-war Democrats; and they in turn appeared anxious to utilize his ability in the furtherance of their interests. George H. Pendleton, who thought he had a chance at the speakership of the House of Representatives in the Thirty-Eighth Congress, wanted Morton to use his influence with the Democrats of the Western states, particularly with leaders like Richardson, to incline them favorably toward his candidacy.⁵ There was little

⁴ Evidently Morton sent Vallandigham's letter to George L. Miller, who wrote: "You ought to be proud of the distinction this letter of Vallandigham gives you as his friend, and of the acknowledgment it makes of your participation in the counsels which so wisely . . . laid down the platform which has resulted in the preservation and reorganization of the Democratic Party . . . I should desire no stronger claim to political honors than Vallandigham accords to you of being one of the chief authors of the Democratic Address. I can conceive of no one thing that it was possible for you to do that is so sure to secure to you political position and influence. . . ." Miller to Morton, July 26, 1863.

⁵ George H. Pendleton to Morton, November 20, 1862.

anyone could do, however, to elect a Democrat to the speakership or any other national office, in 1863.

Clement L. Vallandigham urged Morton to move to Ohio to add his talents to those of Pendleton, Noble, himself and others in the work of keeping that state the center of opposition to Republican conduct of the war. Specifically, he desired Morton to assume control of the Dayton *Empire*, an important critic of the Administration's policy, and a paper which he himself had edited at one time.⁶

Should Morton decide to purchase the paper, Vallandigham thought that it could be had for about half its value. There was a claim of \$4,200 against the office, in the hands of Jonathan Kenney, the county treasurer and "an ultra 'Copperhead,'" and Vallandigham thought that the entire establishment could be had for that amount, or at most \$5,000, though it was "well worth \$8,000."

"But," he wrote, "I want you to come & see for yourself, before you conclude absolutely upon anything. Our friends are all very anxious for you to be with us, & you can find no better place in the country. . . ." ⁷

Before Morton could decide even to look the ground over, Vallandigham was arrested for seditious activity, and as punishment banished to the Confederacy. George H. Pendleton, knowing that Morton would be anxious for news of their mutual friend, wrote a long account of Vallandigham's ordeal:

. . . One week ago today, about this very hour—two o'clock—Val was sent off southward, on a gunboat, to fulfill the sentence which Lincoln & his gang at Washington had imposed,—on Monday morning at daylight he was sent thro the lines, and received by one of the extreme outside pickets of Bragg's army. This is the last authentic account of him. A telegram this morning reports him as the guest of Bragg at his Headquarters. This is not reliable however, tho probably true. I was with him many hours each day from the moment of his arrest till the gunboat carried him off. He was calm, collected, dignified, plucky and always "watching the corner." From the first moment, he made up his mind to endure whatever they might inflict, without a murmur, and to spare no effort to bring good out of evil. He has borne himself nobly. No stain rests on him. Even his enemies are forced to admire him. God bless him—he never was half so great, as when he passed thro the various fortunes which assigned him every grade of punishment. . . . He will be nominated for Governor beyond a doubt. The people wish it, and will have it. I think it will be by acclamation. The prudent leaders

⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1936), XIX:143.

⁷ C. L. Vallandigham to Morton, April 5, 1863.

are against it, & urge some strong showings why he can not be elected—but it all will not do—elected or not, the people intend to vote for him—and this lies nearest his heart. I have devoted myself since his departure to filling engagements at public meetings. Order 38 is not very stringent now that it has accomplished its purpose. The mention of his name calls forth unbounded applause. . . .⁸

In spite of his friendship with leading Copperheads and his action at times in concert with them, fundamentally Morton was loyal to the Union, and opposed to secession. His dilemma, like that of many conservative Democrats, was hating secession hardly more than abolition. It was difficult to join hands wholeheartedly with the ancient enemy to put down the new one, especially under the conviction that abolitionist violence was as much a cause of the war as Southern willfulness; and the conviction, based upon his treatment by the Republican majority in the House of Representatives, that justice could not be expected from the Radicals. Morton confided his difficulties at length to his diary.

Democrats, he held, more than all others should not sympathize with the rebellion, because they had suffered more at the hands of secession and had more cause for vengeance than any other citizens of the Northern states: "Year after year they have battled for the constitutional rights of the South in the Union, our strong men have sacrificed themselves in the wars against abolitionism and we are repaid by secession and by civil war."

He stated clearly that in his opinion the party of "irrepressible conflict" was responsible for the rebellion:

They and they alone of all the millions of the Northern states preached the doctrine that they were opposed to slavery everywhere and that the government could not exist part free & part slave. Lincoln & Seward preached, they held a disunion revival and Jeff Davis & Toombs & Slidell & Mason their infatuated converts are now giving us in the rebellion the experimental piety the practical religion of the Doctrine of the irrepressible conflict. Democrats oppose both the preacher and the practitioner, the exhorters and their converts, and are marshalled everywhere to put down one with ballots and the other with bayonets. They were called to fight for the constitution as it is and the Union as it was.⁹

⁸ Pendleton to Morton, May 29, 1863.

⁹ Morton's diary entries were not kept systematically at this time. The above, for example, appears on the flyleaf of the diary which nominally was for the year 1859.

Despite Morton's hatred of the abolitionists, and his frequent sharp criticism of the conduct of the war, he did as much—or more—to put down the rebellion as many men whose utterances were completely "loyal."

Governor Alvin Saunders appointed him a captain in the Nebraska City Cavalry Company,¹⁰ and in this capacity he served under Colonel Oliver P. Mason. The company was formed to protect the settlers against the Indians, in the absence of regular troops, though there is no evidence that its members did more than meet occasionally for drill on the Nebraska City greensward. Nevertheless, Morton, with a wife and three children in his care, was taking part in as strenuous military activity as numerous other Nebraskans who paraded their loyalty with gusto. In addition, he made an agreement to pay one William McLennan \$1,000—a sum considerably higher than was usually paid for a substitute—to enlist in the Union Army, and remain in its service until he "shall fight at least one battle."¹¹

Then, too, men whose political activities had been such as to entitle them to favors from the Administration were not at all hesitant about asking Morton to use his influence locally in their behalf. John M. Thayer, for example, who had been head of the territorial militia during Morton's term as secretary, wanted appointment to the colonelcy of the First Nebraska Regiment. He wrote Morton a long letter urging him to influence the "military men" of Nebraska City to recommend him to the Governor.¹²

Nevertheless, in the opinion of Morton's contemporaries, his unrestrained attacks on the Lincoln Administration overshadowed his activities on behalf of the Union; and though he was not a member either of the Knights of the Golden Circle or the Sons of Liberty, the epithet "Copperhead" was frequently hurled at him. Democratic insistence upon the possibilities of a compromise healing the nation's wounds was not a position likely to be popular in time of war; and Morton's implacable advocacy of this doctrine could not but win him enemies. Then, too, his inclination to adopt extreme

¹⁰ Certificate in Morton Collection.

¹¹ The agreement, signed by principals and two witnesses, is in the Morton Collection.

¹² Thayer to Morton, June 2, 1861.

positions led him into utterances that dismayed even his closest friends. This was particularly true when long after recourse had been had to arms, he continued in the attempt to place responsibility for the rebellion, at the same time declaring the possibility of immediate peace. Even Dr. George L. Miller, his close friend and co-worker, was disturbed.

"I do not perceive that your extreme notions are exactly the thing," he wrote on January 16, 1863. "It appears to me to be in vain that, in the midst of present storms, we refer back to want of patriotism either on the part of Republicans in the Senate or Breckenridge plotters of treason here & in the South, for guides to the true policy which should govern now. . ."

A month later, after Morton had written to the *Chicago Times*, then edited by Wilbur F. Storey, advocating, in a measure, Valandigham's impossible scheme of a Northwest secession, Miller wrote:

I cannot discover your usual shrewdness in your committal of yourself to such a scheme as you partially did in the *Times* letter. The idea of the Northwest declaring for separation from the Northeast, & for union with the South, will never be realized in my opinion. . . . Such men as Seymour, Van Buren and others by tens of thousands in N. Y. & Penn. seeing the cloud which threatens such a storm will throw the weight of great abilities and their best statesmanship against it, and I apprehend that when the question shall come to a practical issue in the loyal states that a reaction will be created in public opinion which will engulf its authors in a sea of odium. . . .¹³

"I tell you, Morton," he wrote again in the same year, "while I expect to see further popular reactions against the war and while peace policies are sure again to meet the favor of an ever varying popular opinion, the sober, honest, intelligent thought of these Northern states is in favor of sustaining this Republic by force of arms . . . It will be so until the Southern Dictators shall be pressed to meet us on terms that will continue us one nation, undivided and undivisible . . ." ¹⁴

Even within his own family Morton's opinions were censured. His father, who had long looked with misgiving upon Sterling's political activity, was sorely distressed by what he regarded as his latest

¹³ Miller to Morton, February 9, 1863.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 10, 1863.

aberration. Shortly after Fort Sumter, in a letter congratulating him upon his twenty-ninth birthday, J. D. Morton warned his son: "There can now be but two parties in the Free States—Patriots & Traitors, the last named will be attended to as fast as they make themselves known. . . . I hope you will be a loyal citizen supporting the Government right or wrong against the southern traitors & treason. . . ." ¹⁵

J. D. Morton wrote frequently to his son attempting to change his views, and often sent marked copies of various Republican newspapers. However, Sterling took so little to these, that finally his father gave up in utter disgust: "I will send no more papers without you wish it . . . This is the last time I shall mention the subject of politics war or our country to you either in writing or conversation, without *you* request it. I think no good comes of it and that you are like Ephraim of old joined to your *Idol* and that *Idol* is party which overrides all love of country & gives the party the whole party & nothing but the party! . . ." ¹⁶

The charge that they placed party above the Union was leveled everywhere at Democrats who refused to amalgamate with the Republicans in support of the war. The Democratic justification was an insistence that party action was essential to the maintenance of both the Constitution and the Union. Acting on this principle, a determined effort was made in many Northern states to keep the party alive through all the vicissitudes of Civil War.

Morton had been taken into the counsels of the leading conservative Democrats at the beginning of hostilities. His opinions, already well set in the mold of strict Democracy, were hardened by these associations in time of crisis. Although only a young man from a Western territory, his contribution to those counsels was acknowledged by their leaders. Nevertheless, at this time he did not figure importantly in the national scene, except perhaps as an associate of men who did. His importance is to be found in the fact that in his own territory he never for a moment assumed that the Democratic Party should be cast aside, but took the leadership in an almost desperate effort to hold it together. In doing so, his vigorous personality so impressed itself upon the party that its influence was

¹⁵ J. D. Morton to Morton, April 22, 1861.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, August 24, 1863.

felt, whether or not he was active in the party's affairs, during the rest of his life.

In the months just following the outbreak of hostilities, the Democrats in Nebraska were too demoralized to do anything as a party. They continued to discuss the causes of the rebellion, and often expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which Lincoln was attempting to put it down, but they had little hope that the Democracy could do much about it. A. J. Poppleton inquired anxiously as to Morton's opinion about the odd-year elections: "... Shall we run a party ticket? Or shall we join the Republicans in running a union ticket? The soldiering business has, no doubt, taken nine Democrats to one Republican and this fact joined to the patronage they wield, would probably put us hopelessly in the minority for the present—is there any daylight beyond which would justify running a party ticket?"¹⁷

After hearing from Morton that it would be unwise to fuse with the Republicans under any circumstances, Poppleton's courage was considerably bolstered, and he could think of half a dozen reasons himself why they should maintain the party's organization.¹⁸

The Democrats ran straight tickets in the various local elections held in October 1861, and were badly beaten everywhere.

In the months between October 1861, and the time for beginning the campaign to elect a delegate to Congress, there was a growing opinion within the party that the only way to victory was fusion with the Republicans. J. F. Kinney, of Nebraska City, who had been one of Morton's leading opponents in the convention of 1860, appears to have been the leader of the group favoring fusion. In order to forestall the fusionist element of the party the central committee decided to hold the convention early enough so that the Republicans would not have had opportunity to meet and formulate definite overtures.¹⁹ When the convention met, however, Kinney, though unable to promote fusion was strong enough to get the delegate nomination for himself. Poppleton strenuously opposed Kinney as a man who was not a true Democrat, and when he finally received the nomination, the Douglas County delegation withdrew.

¹⁷ A. J. Poppleton to Morton, August 29, 1861.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, September 8, 1861.

¹⁹ Poppleton to Morton, July 12, 1862.

Daily was renominated by the Republicans, though not without a struggle. He was charged with willful neglect in not having obtained an appropriation to complete the capitol in his three sessions in Congress; and he had also made enemies because a North Platte route for the Pacific Railroad had been selected.²⁰

With both parties somewhat split the campaign was a listless one. Daily, after praising Lincoln, denouncing the Democrats as secessionists, and allegedly promising at least one hundred and fifty men the colonelcy in a new Nebraska Regiment, was elected by a majority of 136²¹—surprisingly small under the circumstances. The Democrats were divided and discouraged, and Kinney did not contest the returns. For the first time since 1854, a delegate-elect had gone from Nebraska in unquestioned possession of his seat.

The Democratic Party in Nebraska appeared to be approaching dissolution. They were seemingly without an issue. The "Address" of May did not sound very convincing in far-off Nebraska. There was nothing around which opposition to the Administration could coalesce. There was the financial issue; but it could not command much popular attention in wartime. There was dissatisfaction with the manner in which the war was being prosecuted; but the Democrats offered nothing that seemed measurably better. It was not until President Lincoln issued his proclamation emancipating the slaves that an issue was found.

Now that the President revealed his determination to "free the nigger," Democrats who had been wavering toward fusion, hurried back to the straight and narrow party line. An adherent from Omaha wrote Morton: ". . . I think that it is about time to commence 'a vigorous prosecution of the war' against Abolitionists in this Territory and we propose to commence now. . . . The people here are getting all right, democracy is getting very popular. Men who were in favor of the war, extermination, emancipation, arbitrary arrests and all other unconstitutional measures . . . are now loud in their denunciation of the administration in almost every respect. . . ." ²²

²⁰ Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People*, I:316-317.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² A. J. Harrison to Morton, January 31, 1863.

The *Omaha Nebraskan*, at that time edited by Milton W. Reynolds who had given way to A. J. Harvey on the *News*, declared: "... all our hopes for a restoration of the Union under Mr. Lincoln are extinguished. There is not the slightest probability, not even the remotest ghost of a chance in our opinion, that the war will close, and Peace . . . again return to this ruined, distracted land, during Mr. Lincoln's presidential term. The people have only tasted as yet the foam of intoxication contained in the bitter cup pressed to their lips. Its destructive poisonous dregs they have yet to drink. Crucifixion of States is yet to be witnessed." ²³

At the same time the paper urged that Democrats, now more than ever, should stand by the principles of the party: "... The God given truths of the Democracy will do to live by, and if need be to die by and for. Who that has ever called himself a Democrat is now so mean and cowardly as to be ashamed of them?" ²⁴

Morton, writing in the *Chicago Times* under the pseudonym of "Cornbread," both condemned and ridiculed the President and the Proclamation:

... I have always believed it [the Proclamation] coming. The radicals have always been the controlling element in the Republican Party . . . and they have brought "Old Abe" to his present pitiable position, and the country to eternal war or eternal disunion. . . .

And here we see what an ass George Washington was when he raised a force to put down the whisky insurrection in Pennsylvania. Poor old fogey, he ought simply to have reasoned thus: Whisky is the cause of the rebellion. I will proclaim Whisky abolished and distilleries confiscated, and thus remove cause and effect together. It was left to our day and generation of statesmen to show the simplicity and inefficiency of Washington's style of suppressing rebellion. . . .

I see by the papers that we can hardly arm the new recruits as fast as they arrive. I would, therefore, in the name of twenty millions, suggest that in lieu of pistols, swords and guns, each soldier be provided with a long handled Presidential proclamation. Heavy ordnance may be dispensed with by using Stanton's orders, and Phelps' and Hunter's proclamations will do as substitutes for small arms. ²⁵

In addition to the national issue of emancipation, the Democrats were invigorated by the Republican attempt in 1864 to make Nebraska a state, which gave them a bona fide local issue. The terri-

²³ *Omaha Nebraskan*, September 11, 1863.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, September 25, 1863.

²⁵ *Chicago Times*, October 4, 1862.

torial legislature, before adjournment in January, had at the request of Governor Saunders adopted a joint resolution for the holding of a constitutional convention.²⁶

Democrats denounced the entire movement as nothing but an "Abolitionist trick" designed on the one hand to help elect Lincoln to another term, and on the other to further the pecuniary and political interests of Republican officeholders in Nebraska. The *Omaha Nebraskian*, at that time the most prominent of the party's spokesmen, declared: ". . . The Democracy will oppose the whole thing . . . The Democracy, as it has ever done, will oppose all schemes for the benefit of clans and cliques, or leaders of clans and cliques; but on the contrary, will never consent to move in favor of a State government till a majority of the people are in favor of the measure and until it can be shown that by coming in the people of the Territory will on the whole be benefitted by it. . . ." ²⁷

The *Nebraskian* and other Democratic papers raised the cry that if the people of Nebraska adopted statehood, they would be voting upon themselves a crushing burden of taxation. Eleazer Wakeley, former Associate Territorial Justice, wrote to Morton praising the united stand the party was taking against statehood, yet warned that their estimates of the expenses of a state government were inadequate. He urged them to point out with greater emphasis that in addition to the increased regular expenses there would be the "thousand contingent expenses: . . . a brood of clerks in every state office, the support of state convicts, and other charitable institutions, care and repairs of public buildings, printing of reports, &c, stationery, laying out state roads, keeping the Library, militia organization &c &c indefinitely." ²⁸

The Democrats evidently had made their case against statehood strong enough, however, for in the election of June 6, a majority of delegates pledged to adjournment without any action whatsoever were elected to the constitutional convention.²⁹

Between the election and the constitutional convention the Democrats met at Plattsmouth to elect delegates to the national convention

²⁶ *House Journal*, Ninth Session, 82.

²⁷ *Omaha Nebraskian*, May 27, 1864.

²⁸ E. Wakeley to Morton, June 12, 1864.

²⁹ Morton-Watkins, I:482.

in Chicago. Morton, as chairman of the committee on resolutions, wrote and got adopted a platform that dealt almost wholly with the problem of statehood. He congratulated the people of Nebraska upon the results of the recent election declining a state government, "whose sole benefit of multiplying offices and facilitating public plunder would be dearly purchased by ruinous taxation which would have eaten out the subsistence of our people, and drafts for the army which would have consumed our population."³⁰

He reminded them, however, that the "iniquity" of statehood was rebuked only through the organized effort of the Democratic Party; and, indicating the prevalent political distrust, warned:

That we have heard with astonishment that certain federal office holders in this territory propose, in utter disregard of popular sentiment expressed with great unanimity at the late election, to persist in their scheme of forcing the burden of a state government upon this people by cunningly devised oaths, to be administered to the members of . . . [the convention], and by an organization of the minority of that body, notwithstanding its adjournment by the majority, and that such a project, and the first suggestion of such a project, by repudiated and debauched politicians, deserves, and will receive the opprobrium, and its authors will meet the fate of revolutionary fanatics, faithless to public duty and defeated in treasonable measures.³¹

Democratic fears were not to be realized. The convention met July 4, and adjourned the same day, thirty-five to seven *sine die*.³² Temporarily, at least, Republican ambitions to make Nebraska a state while they were yet in power had been forestalled. For the Democrats, it was the first taste of victory they had had since the war began.

Fulfilling its other function the Plattsmouth meeting chose as delegates to the Democratic National Convention: J. Sterling Morton, Andrew J. Poppleton, Erastus B. Chandler, Joseph I. Early, John B. Bennett, and John Rickley. As delegates from a territory, they could take no active part in the convention's proceedings, but could merely attend. Morton, Bennett, and Early went in together from Nebraska City. Accompanying them was Master Joy Morton, age eight.³³

³⁰ *Omaha Nebraskan*, July 1, 1864.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Morton-Watkins, I:482.

³³ Diary, August 23, 1864.

The straddling compromise reached at Chicago, placing General George B. McClellan on a platform which at once advocated peace and war, was satisfactory to no one. To a vigorous partisan such as Morton, it was downright distasteful. He wrote in his diary: "I am displeased with platform & nominee McClellan. They will both be beaten & ought to be. I am for Peace, Peace Platform & Peace Man on it & so we would deceive no one who is for war as the only means of restoring the Union. Peace *might* restore it. War cannot & war makes disunion."

Insofar as Morton represented the so-called "Vallandigham Element" of the party, his opinion of the work of the Chicago convention serves to discount the frequently expressed belief that the ruling spirit of the Democratic meetings was Vallandigham. The second resolution, supposedly framed by the exiled Ohioan, demanding: "immediate cessation of hostilities . . . to the end that, at the earliest practicable moment, peace may be restored on the basis of the federal union of the states,"³⁴ may, as was often claimed, have been regarded in the South as tantamount to recognition of Rebel independence.³⁵ Yet Morton, who constantly was for peace as the only possible means of restoring the Union, could see no good in it. During the entire campaign of 1864, he made little show of activity or enthusiasm. The territorial nominating convention was held at Nebraska City, on September 16, and though Morton attended as a delegate, he took no active part in the proceedings. The Convention adopted the national platform and nominated George L. Miller as its candidate for delegate to Congress, the only important territorial office to be filled.³⁶

Miller was opposed by Phineas W. Hitchcock, the candidate of the new Union Party. Hitchcock's nomination was ascribed to the influence of Samuel G. Daily, who though apparently not strong enough to get renominated himself, was able to dictate the choice of his successor. After a rather spiritless campaign whose outcome

³⁴ Thomas H. McKee, *The National Conventions and Platforms of All Political Parties, 1789 to 1905* (Baltimore, 1906), 122.

³⁵ Henry Charles Lea, "The Record of the Democratic Party, 1860-1865" (Political pamphlet, University of Nebraska Library), n.d.

³⁶ *Omaha Nebraskian*, September 26, 1864.

was never in doubt, Hitchcock was elected by the largest majority a Republican had received in Nebraska up to that time.³⁷

Miller was inclined to blame his defeat on the Vallandigham wing of the party. He felt that the Chicago convention under the influence of Vallandigham had gone too far in the direction of peace at any price. Had they been willing to compromise a little more on the platform—though in Morton's opinion they had compromised too much—"George B. McClellan would have been carried into the Presidency upon a tide which would have swept the whole country like a hurricane."³⁸

He was emphatic, however, in disclaiming any intent to blame Morton personally, and branded as the work of "bleating abolitionists" the rumors that he held Morton responsible for the small vote he received in Otoe County: "I really think my public avowals in Nebraska City should have guarded me securely against a suspicion of infidelity to my undoubted obligations to you."³⁹

The Democrats in Nebraska had been held together through three years of civil war, and at times, such as in the election of delegates to the constitutional convention, had given evidence that they might once again attain the ascendancy in the territory. But after the Chicago convention and the attendant disastrous defeat, there appeared little that could be done; or indeed, little use of doing anything. The party had proved itself unable to unite on a successful policy, and the people by their re-election of Abraham Lincoln had expressed impatience with political opposition to the policy of the Administration. It appeared necessary for Democrats to subjugate their political ambitions to the more important task of saving the Union—this no matter how fearful they might be of certain administration policies.

All during 1864, Morton was increasingly despondent and apprehensive over the Union's future. In his birthday letter to his mother, he had written: "Under what sort of despotism will your Grandchildren grow up; amidst what degradation of all that is American

³⁷ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I:325-326.

³⁸ Miller to Morton, October 30, 1864.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1864.

will your posterity be reared? God only knows and in His wisdom and goodness He veils that awful knowledge from our understandings. To me the future of what was once the United States looks dark and fearful, as a raging storm at midnight, when winds howl and torrents roar and danger shrieks in every blast. . . ."

So dark did he think the future of "what was once the United States," that he seriously considered selling his farm and moving out of the Union. At one time he thought of going to Canada, at another to Nassau, another to Mexico, and it is evident from his papers, that he even was considering the Sandwich Islands as a possible future home. He was advised against this course by his friends, and by his father who was sure that he could not duplicate his home and farm for the cash he could get out of them. His father added: "I do not propose to get vexed in regard to what you may do, hoping you may not take up a business which will disgrace you, or locate where it will be dishonorable for you to live. But mark my words, productive real estate is the best property a man can own."⁴⁰

Discouraged or not, Morton remained in Nebraska. He kept a diary during the winter of 1864-65, and its entries show a preoccupation with the activity of his pioneer farm. Seemingly, he, like Democrats generally, had abandoned active political life for the duration of the war. As was usually the case when he was not engaged in active political warfare, Morton made rather long entries in his journal. He discussed the weather fully each day; visitors to the farm were carefully noted. On February 18, 1865, there was a special event—a fourth son, Carl, was born.

Finally, in the spring, came peace. Morton, with Oliver P. Mason, was asked to speak at a mass meeting in Nebraska City celebrating the salvation of the Union. It was the first time he had addressed a public gathering since the Plattsmouth Convention. A few days later he received a letter from Clement L. Vallandigham, "hopeful that the country and constitution might be saved to American citizens."⁴¹

The Democratic Party in Nebraska, though dormant since the election of 1864, was still alive. The willingness of its leaders to risk

⁴⁰ J. D. Morton to Morton, December 6, 1864.

⁴¹ Diary, April 13, 1865.

their political fortunes in keeping it going had maintained its existence. With the coming of peace, the party was reinvigorated; and though it recovered only slowly from the injuries sustained during the Civil War, it was able, thanks to those who kept it alive, to function as a vigorous minority force, and a powerful organ of criticism against the party in power. It remained for new issues of later years to recast the political party divisions and rally new forces under old names.

CHAPTER TEN

DEFEAT BECOMES FINAL

IN THE UNION, exultation over victory was drowned in tears of grief and anger over the assassination of the President. Even those who had been most bitter in their criticism of his conduct of the war were struck with the awful portents of the act. Anti-war Democrats who had grasped eagerly at each stray bit of news of the impending fall of Richmond in the fervent hope that it heralded the dawn of a new day, felt that the assassination rendered the future more dark and fearful than ever before.

Morton feared that it was the beginning of a reign of terror, "a sad and portentous crime which greatly imperilled life, liberty and the Union."¹

There was great apprehension that, unpalatable as Lincoln had been, the fiery Tennessean who succeeded him would be even worse. William A. Richardson, for example, thought that Johnson would hang all the leading rebels, both civil and military, and though he had been outspoken in his opposition to Lincoln, felt that if he could have lived he would have pursued a more pacific course.²

After the immediate revulsion and trembling over the assassination had passed, however, and President Johnson, despite earlier fire-breathing against the rebels, began to pursue a relatively

¹ Diary, April 15, 1865.

² Richardson to Morton, May 17, 1865.

moderate course in reconstruction, and to make himself acceptable to conservatives both North and South, the Democracy, hope kindled anew, gradually began to show signs of life. In Nebraska this was first manifested by the entry into journalism in the summer of 1865 of two young men who already were recognized as the leaders of the party, and who from this time forward were to exert an increasing amount of control in the direction of its affairs: George L. Miller and J. Sterling Morton.

Dr. Miller, who had moved to Nebraska as a physician, soon had subordinated medicine to politics; and it was as a politician-editor that he left his stamp upon the history of Nebraska and the West. He made his bow as editor with an altogether new paper, the *Omaha Daily and Weekly Herald*, which he organized in partnership with Frank Carpenter. They began publication in October.

Omaha at this time was badly in need of a good Democratic paper. The *Nebraskian*, which formerly had done good service as the party's organ, recently had fallen into factiousness, and was doing more to disrupt than unite the party.³ Under such circumstances, many Democrats in the city felt that they had no paper, and as it did not appear that they soon would be able to get control of one, Miller was persuaded to start a new one.⁴

Morton re-entered the ranks of active newspaper men on August 25, when once again he became editor of the *Nebraska City News*. During the two years he had previously edited the *News*,⁵ he had raised it to a position of pre-eminence among the newspapers of the territory, and had made it the Democracy's foremost spokesman. In the years between 1857 and 1865 it had been well edited by Milton W. Reynolds and Augustus F. Harvey, and largely because it was always looked upon as "Morton's organ," had kept its position of prominence; but it lacked that color which only Morton could give. His facile and audacious pen could make even the "Locals" good reading. His sharp and caustic wit, while inviting to combat, after a few thrusts, sent even the most hardy opponent scurrying for cover.

³ See editorials in the issues of February 9, and April 6, 1865.

⁴ Miller to Morton, September 30, 1865.

⁵ 1855-1857.

Thomas Morton, the publisher, had been steadily improving his establishment, and Morton had much more to work with in 1865 than a decade before when he hired out to the town company.⁶ The office had long since been removed from the second story of the old blockhouse, and after the great fire of 1860 which had consumed almost half a hundred buildings, Thomas Morton had rebuilt the office and purchased new fixtures and equipment.⁷

Soon after he took it over, Morton plunged the *News* into a heated political campaign, and by this token returned himself to active politics after a temporary retirement resulting from the disappointments of 1864.

Of immediate interest was the legislative campaign of 1865. Largely through the influence of Morton and the *News*, Democrats made the question of negro suffrage in Nebraska the main issue of the contest.

"We are convinced," Morton wrote, "that a determined, though secret effort will be made, at the ensuing election in this Territory, to elect men to the Legislative Assembly pledged, in 'the League,' to pass 'a bill for a law to extend the right of suffrage to negroes in Nebraska.' The radical press of the Territory . . . are all favorable to this scheme, and not one of them will or dare oppose it. The fate of radicalism depends upon this measure, not only in Nebraska, but all over the United States, and a large majority of the late Republican party are avowedly in favor of it. Chief Justice Chase and all his followers make it one of the main planks in their party platform. Not a republican, radical or abolitionist in Nebraska will dare deny it."⁸

At the Democratic Territorial Convention, held in Plattsmouth on September 21, Morton in his favorite and oft-held position, that of chairman of the committee on resolutions, wrote and got adopted a platform which devoted two of its four planks to the suffrage question. The platform condemned the Republican attempt to force negro suffrage upon the Southern states "as unjust and unwarrantable interference with the reserved rights of the states as it would be to force California to permit Chinamen to vote;" and declared that,

⁶ See pp. 50-51.

⁷ Andreas, *op. cit.*, II:1212.

⁸ *Nebraska City News*, September 16, 1865.

"negroes are neither by nature nor education entitled to political nor social equality with the white race." ⁹

Republican papers in the territory heaped abuse upon Morton for this platform and other declarations in a way that was unusual even in those days of unbridled license of the political press. After Missouri had disfranchised those who had participated in the rebellion, Morton, in the columns of the *News*, invited them to make their homes in Nebraska City. The *Nebraska Advertiser* declared that the consequences of that act were "becoming more apparent every day in the theft, larceny and rowdyism of that city," and when Morton had two horses stolen in November, it rejoiced in the fact, and remarked: "This is rather a steep contribution on Morton for their assistance in 'voting down the blue-coated, brass-buttoned yankees.'" ¹⁰

The violence of the territorial press passed the bounds of the printed sheet. Dr. Robert R. Livingston of Plattsmouth, an officer in the Union Army, challenged the editor of the *News* to satisfaction on the field of combat. During the last week of July 1866, four letters were exchanged in which Morton ridiculed his fiery correspondent with his most penetrating verbal shafts. His combination of ridicule and satire is evident in the following paragraph:

Convey to your bellicose principal my renewed assurance that he has never in any way given me reason to demand satisfaction from him. His propositions to shoot lead bullets at me is not in accordance either with law or my own ideas of social amenities and amusements. Please tell your principal that I enjoy life and love it even better than I do him. To kill or to be killed would be no particular felicity to me, especially in hot weather when corpses spoil so rapidly. You request me to name a friend with whom you can confer. It flatters me much to intimate that I have friends and I hereby authorize you to correspond with all of them at your leisure.

Needless to say there was no casualty on the proposed field of combat.

The other important issue in 1865 was the perennial question of statehood. All realized, of course, that statehood was inevitable in

⁹ Morton-Watkins, I:499-500.

¹⁰ *Nebraska Advertiser*, November 23, 1865.

the not too distant future. Each party sought only to arrange for admission at a time when it would be likely to reap the first fruits.

Unified Democratic opposition had defeated statehood in 1864, but by the summer of 1865 there was considerable Democratic sentiment favorable to admission. George L. Miller, whose main interest was to make Omaha a great city, wrote that if he thought it possible that the measure would carry and thus Omaha could secure the services of two senators and a representative, "in sustaining the old railroad line," he definitely would be for it.¹¹

E. B. Chandler reported that it was the general opinion of the leading Democrats of Omaha that the party should be rather non-committal regarding statehood, feeling that if the people wanted admission, Democratic prospects were as good as those of the Republicans in the distribution of the important offices, providing the odium of opposing a successful movement were not attached to them.¹² As James M. Woolworth put it, the Democrats of Omaha felt that they "ought not to foreclose . . . [their] future choice by positive action now."¹³

Morton, however, could never agree to such a temporizing policy. Politic or not, he would have a definite commitment one way or the other. In his opinion, nothing would be gained by early statehood and in drawing up the platform at the Plattsmouth convention he included a plank which declared the election of 1864, in which the people of the territory by large majorities opposed statehood, as decisive of the question, and expressed astonishment "at the persistent renewal of the effort of republican office-holders to force . . . a change of our condition upon us."¹⁴

This resolution provoked much discussion, but finally it was adopted. Once again Morton's strength in the party's councils was conclusively demonstrated.

All during the campaign Morton kept the *News* vigorously anti-state, unwilling to yield an inch, except perhaps to favor submitting the question of statehood—not a state constitution—once again to the people. He thought even this a useless expense.

¹¹ Miller to Morton, July 12, 1865.

¹² E. B. Chandler to Morton, July 16, 1865.

¹³ Woolworth to Morton, September 19, 1865.

¹⁴ Morton-Watkins, I:500.

Morton and others of his opinion regarded the results of the legislative election as generally "conservative."¹⁵ The Democrats achieved a majority in the lower house and were able to elect James G. Megeath of Omaha, a staunch old-liner, as speaker. Oliver P. Mason was elected president of the Council. He was a Republican, but fairly palatable to the conservatives. Personally, Morton got along with him rather well. He had retained him in his suit against Governor Black.¹⁶ As fellow Nebraska Citians they were frequently in each other's homes.

No sooner had the legislature been convened, however, than it became evident that a determined move would be made in the direction of statehood. Governor Alvin Saunders favored it in his annual message, a great majority of the Republicans were for it, and even a number of the Democrats who had been elected on an anti-state platform had come to the conclusion that immediate statehood was to the best interests of the party and the territory.

J. B. Bennett, member of the Council from Otoe County, wrote Morton that such was his decision. He had favored statehood somewhat even before leaving home, and after the favorable organization of both houses, he had become fully convinced that Democrats should favor statehood during the present session. He urged Morton to "come up . . . right away that the leading democrats might counsel together and have a complete understanding with one another."¹⁷

Morton went to Omaha, and stayed during most of the remainder of the session, but not to reach an understanding with pro-state Democrats. He still was of the opinion that neither the territory nor the party would benefit by admission into the Union, and with the aid of Dr. Miller, who had lost his interest in immediate statehood, worked hard to prevent a state bill from passing. Within the legislature, the anti-state movement was led by Benjamin E. B. Kennedy of the Council, and Charles H. Brown of the House. Though these men were active both within and without the legislative halls, they could not keep the Democrats united against state-

¹⁵ See H. H. Heath to Morton, January 24, 1866.

¹⁶ See p. 112.

¹⁷ J. B. Bennett to Morton, January 10, 1866.

hood, and a joint resolution was passed providing for the submission of a state constitution to the people.¹⁸

The anti-state men in the lower house were able, however, to pass a resolution directing the Speaker to appoint a committee, "to investigate charges of bribery and corruption made in relation to the passage of the joint resolution submitting a state constitution to the people of Nebraska." The findings of the committee were inconclusive, but Lorenzo Crounse¹⁹ and Joseph Arnold took advantage of the occasion to submit a minority report castigating Morton for his attempts to influence the legislature. So provoked were they that they abandoned the usually formal language of a legislative report for that of a stump speech: "One J. Sterling Morton, editor of Nebraska City 'News,' a would-be leader of the democracy of the Territory, and active anti-state man, before, during and since the submission and passage of the joint resolution has spent most of his time on the floor of this House caucusing with members, drafting buncombe political resolutions for members to introduce in the House, by which its time was occupied to the exclusion of more legitimate and profitable business."²⁰

The resolution of 1866 did not provide for calling a constitutional convention as the one of 1864 had done. Rather, a constitution framed by a special committee, and adopted by the legislature, was to be submitted to the people for approval or rejection on June 2; and at the same time, state officers, judges of the supreme court, a member of the federal House of Representatives, and members of a legislature, to be convened on July 4, were to be elected.

Circumstances under which the constitution was adopted by the legislature were most unusual. It was drawn up with virtually no discussion, and was voted upon without even the benefit of printed copies so that the members might acquaint themselves with its provisions. It is little wonder that the anti-state men wanted an investigation.

Regardless of how much they might have deplored the mode of admission, or even statehood itself, under the circumstances there was little the anti-state Democrats could do. Some thought that it

¹⁸ *House Journal*, Eleventh Session, 92; *Council Journal*, Eleventh Session, 138.

¹⁹ Later Congressman and Governor.

²⁰ *House Journal*, Eleventh Session, 203-205.

still might be possible to unite the party against the proposed constitution.²¹ Morton was inclined toward this view. The majority, however, felt that the Democracy could not afford to stake everything upon opposition to the proposed constitution; that under the circumstances the party should nominate a ticket, and while hoping to defeat the constitution, be prepared to assume as much control as possible, should the territory be admitted. As Dr. Miller wrote to Morton: ". . . If there is any danger we had better nominate. We can carry the Legislature in spite of the devil, and I am not sure but we may elect the Representative. . . ." ²²

Moreover, it was evident, even to the most uncompromising of its opponents, that statehood could not long be forestalled. The territory was filling up. Settlement had advanced well beyond the river counties. The people, growing in wealth and numbers, would not long deny themselves the advantages of equal representation in Congress, and the advantages of statehood. Nevada, with but a fraction of the population of Nebraska, already had been admitted.

The Democrats convened at Nebraska City, April 19. The Republican convention had already been held, and had presented a ticket of pro-state men, headed by David Butler for governor and Turner M. Marquette for representative in Congress. The Republicans, of course, had adopted a platform advocating the adoption of the proposed constitution.

It was uncertain when the Democrats met just how they would combat the opposition. The Douglas County delegation was pledged to favor the nomination of a ticket, which was tantamount to acceptance of the constitution.²³ Richardson and Pawnee counties were known to be strongly in favor of the same course. Morton, on the other hand, was expected to bring his powerful influence, "fighting and furious against [a] ticket." ²⁴ There was fear in many quarters that a serious split would result.

Somewhat to the surprise, and to the great joy of all, the convention was a veritable love-feast. Morton, as chairman of the committee on resolutions, presented a platform which confined itself

²¹ Cf. James M. Woolworth to Morton, February 24, 1866.

²² George L. Miller to Morton, March 12, 1866.

²³ J. W. Paddock to Morton, April 10, 1865.

²⁴ Miller to Morton, *loc. cit.*

to general statements on rights of the people, and a denunciation of the Republicans for their opposition to President Johnson. The sentiment of his associates evidently had overcome his opposition to immediate statehood. The convention in turn enthusiastically nominated Morton as its candidate for governor. Other nominations were: Charles W. Sturges, secretary of state; Guy C. Barnum, auditor; St. John Goodrich, chief justice; Edward W. Thomas and Benjamin E. B. Kennedy, associate justices; and Dr. John R. Brooke, representative in Congress.²⁵

The first campaign for state offices in Nebraska was characterized by all of the frontier vigor that had marked the territorial political struggles. The press of each side struck out at the other in a fury of frenzied partisanship. The opposing candidates denounced each other with unbridled license. Each party had the services of capable and colorful orators. Aside from Morton, who was judged by friend and foe the most gifted political entertainer in Nebraska, the Democrats had the services of George Francis Train, eccentric and picturesque world traveller, who in the first white suit ever seen in Nebraska stumped the state for the Democratic ticket. Train, attracted to Omaha by the Union Pacific Railroad, had flourished in the bustling city and had become a property owner; and though his career was later to include a term in an English jail, he took a great interest in Nebraska's future. Train and Morton, brilliant, witty, and not above taking hilarious advantage of their less gifted opponents, gave the Democrats a combination that put the weighty and ponderous argument of the Republican candidates at great disadvantage.²⁶

Democratic failure to make statehood an issue of the campaign was a source of much Republican discomfiture. The Republicans had expected to split their opponents on this issue, and carry easily both the constitution and their ticket. The *Brownville Advertiser* called the Democratic platform which made no mention of the question, "the greatest medley of sense and nonsense, treason and

²⁵ Morton-Watkins, I:520-521.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I:521.

a stagger at loyalty, copperheadism and Democracy, that could be hatched up by even so gifted a cuss as J. S. Morton.”²⁷

Morton enjoyed attacks of this nature. They gave him an excellent background for pointing out that the preamble and first resolution of the platform were copied verbatim from Thomas Jefferson’s first inaugural address.

The feature of the campaign was a series of debates between the candidates for the governorship. Morton was at his best in an engagement of this kind, and not even the most bitter partisan of the opposition would deny that he argued with vehemence and wit. The main issues as he saw them were whether Butler and the Republicans favored negro suffrage in Nebraska, and whether they endorsed the reconstruction policy of the Johnson administration.²⁸

Butler, on the other hand, was no mean debater, and his seemingly unaffected sincerity possibly was more useful in reaching the sensibilities of the majority than was Morton’s brilliant wit. His favorite exclamation, “I thank God from my heart of hearts,” was combined with an attempt to impugn his opponent’s loyalty during the late war. The bloody shirt was a grim reality in post-war Nebraska politics.

The results of this first state election were close, and because of poor communications, for a time in doubt. A week after the vote had been cast it still looked “very tight” to George L. Miller, though he was fearful of the outcome, because he had “no doubt” but that certain of the canvassing boards were “swindling.”²⁹ It soon was evident that, in one instance at least, these fears were to be realized.

The Cass County board of canvassers threw out the entire vote of the Rock Bluffs Precinct on the grounds of a technical irregularity. Technically it was required that the poll book and tally list returned to the county clerk be certified separately by the judges and clerks of the election. At Rock Bluffs, the poll book, tally, and abstract were bound together in a book and one certificate was attached to them all. Because of this, the entire vote—107 for Mor-

²⁷ *Nebraska Advertiser*, April 26, 1866.

²⁸ Morton was always afraid of an “unqualified” electorate, and the vote in the hands of the uneducated freedman was in his opinion a serious threat to popular government. In later years, he felt the same way about the vote of the propertyless.

²⁹ Miller to Morton, June 13, 1866.

ton, 50 for Butler—was disallowed. The Democrats regarded this as "swindling," because the same irregularity occurred at Plattsmouth, the county seat, yet the vote of that precinct—giving a sizable majority to Butler—was allowed to stand.³⁰ Not only did the Democrats charge discrimination, but they declared that the Enabling Act of 1864, under which the election was held, gave the county board no authority for going behind the precinct returns.

Further, the Democrats complained that the Organic Act, the fundamental law of the territory, had been violated in the conduct of the election. Section five of the act provided that no soldier should be allowed to vote or hold office in the territory simply by reason of being in service therein. The territorial canvassing board, however, had counted the vote of the First Regiment of Nebraska Volunteers stationed at Fort Kearny, which, the Democrats alleged, included a large number of Iowans.

Thus, while the official returns gave Butler the election by a vote of 4,093 to 3,948, the Democrats, by deducting the soldier vote cast for each man and adding the vote of Rock Bluffs, would have had Morton elected by 4,014 to 3,991.³¹

The election was virtually a complete Republican victory. The constitution was approved, and all Republican candidates for state offices were elected, except Oliver P. Mason who was defeated for chief justice by William A. Little.³² Had the vote been counted as the Democrats insisted it should have been, the constitution would have been defeated, and all Democratic state candidates would have been elected. Had this occurred, the territory would have been in the anomalous position of having defeated the constitution which was the token by which it was asking admission, while at the same time electing a set of state officers.

Rock Bluffs was a name that brought recollection of infamy throughout Morton's life. For not only had the action disallowing the vote cost him the governorship, but it proved to be the deciding factor in the action that denied him the opportunity to represent Nebraska in the United States Senate. He and George L. Miller

³⁰ Woolworth, "Address to the People of Nebraska," signed by twenty-one members of the legislature. In Morton-Watkins, I:529n-536n.

³¹ Butler's soldier vote was 152, his Rock Bluffs vote, 50; Morton's soldier vote was 41, Rock Bluffs, 107.

³² Morton-Watkins, I:523-524.

were the choices of the Democratic legislators for the honor. Opposing them were John M. Thayer and Thomas W. Tipton. The Rock Bluffs Precinct was sufficiently large to determine the entire Cass County vote which involved six seats: four representatives from Cass County, one Senator from Cass, and one from Cass, Lancaster, and Saline. Excluding these, the House stood seventeen Republicans and seventeen Democrats; the Senate, six Democrats and five Republicans. Clearly the Cass County vote made a difference. Both Houses decided the contests for the Cass County seats in favor of the Republicans.³³ The Republicans, having a majority in both Houses, elected Thayer and Tipton to the Senate, the vote being cast on straight party lines.

In the midst of their defeat, Democrats turned to the National Union movement being organized by the supporters of President Johnson in an endeavor to defeat the Radicals in the Congressional election of 1866. It seemed to offer some little hope of aiding them in their attempt to wrest control from the Radical Republicans who seemed destined to direct the affairs of the new state. A formal union between the Democrats and the Johnson Republicans was effected in the summer of 1866, though the group was by no means harmonious. The Johnson men appeared desirous of keeping Miller and Morton, the dominant members of the Democratic Party, out of control. A convention was held at Plattsmouth to elect men to represent the Territory of Nebraska at the Philadelphia convention, called for August 14, but it was a completely unrepresentative body. Only eight men were in attendance, and the meeting was not public, but was held in a private room of the Platte Valley House.³⁴ Neither Miller nor Morton were among those chosen by this group.

This fact, however, did not deter either of them from going to Philadelphia. James R. Porter, one of the men selected by the Plattsmouth "convention," authorized Morton to go as his proxy. Miller attended with a proxy from A. J. Poppleton, who had been chosen not by the Plattsmouth meeting, but by the Democrats of the legislature.³⁵

³³ *House Journal*, First Session, 32; *Senate Journal*, First Session, 31.

³⁴ S. H. Calhoun to Morton, August 4, 1866.

³⁵ Morton-Watkins, I:537. Morton also had been chosen by the Democrats of the legislature.

Conservative Republican opposition to Morton probably was engendered in part by a feeling that his bitter opposition to the war could be used to advantage against the movement by the Radicals, and partly by personal ill feeling. It could not have been because he failed to support Johnson in 1866, for he used the *News* enthusiastically in the President's behalf. He praised his courage and honesty, and asserting that "Andrew Johnson stands between the people and the attempt to destroy the popular Government which our fathers bequeathed to us," he declared: "It is the duty of every man who loves his country to stand by the President in this great crisis."³⁶

Enroute to Philadelphia, the two men whom the Johnson Republicans of Nebraska disliked so heartily stopped over in Washington and were introduced to the President by William A. Richardson. They discussed statehood for Nebraska and joked about the bill admitting the territory. Johnson remarked that it was still lying on his desk, and Morton responded: "If the bill lied as well as its friends lied for it, it would continue there for some time."³⁷

Those in charge of affairs at Philadelphia, however, were not inclined to welcome Northern Democrats who had been known for their opposition to the war. Seeing that there was "a very general disposition . . . to exclude them from the Convention,"³⁸ these men, led by Clement L. Vallandigham and Fernando Wood, withdrew from the meeting. Miller and Morton were among the anti-war Democrats, yet they attended the convention,³⁹ and Morton was appointed to the Johnson Executive Committee for Nebraska.⁴⁰

Since the federal government had not yet definitely settled the question of statehood, it was necessary in the election of 1866 to make nominations for both state and territorial offices in Nebraska. The important offices to be filled, aside from those of state and territorial legislatures, were: under the state constitution, a representative in Congress, and under the territorial government, a delegate to Congress. The regular Republicans nominated John Taffe for congressman and T. M. Marquette for delegate. The Democrats

³⁶ *Nebraska City News*, May 26, 1866.

³⁷ *Omaha Herald*, August 24, 1866.

³⁸ James G. Randall, *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning* (Springfield, 1933), II, 89.

³⁹ *Diary*, August 14, 15, 1866.

⁴⁰ *Nebraska Advertiser*, August 23, 1866.

and the Johnson Republicans held their conventions in Plattsmouth on September 11, and in the same building. The Democrats met upstairs, and the Johnson Republicans downstairs. They cooperated to the extent of nominating between the two groups but one man for each position. Thus the Republicans nominated Algernon S. Paddock for congressman, and the Democrats named the joint candidate for delegate. They chose Morton, who during the year had already been the candidate of the party for governor and senator.⁴¹

It was a thankless task the party had imposed upon him. There was little chance of election, and even if he were elected, it was hardly to be expected that he would be able to serve his full term, for even though President Johnson had allowed the bill admitting Nebraska to lapse by a pocket veto, it was generally conceded that admission was imminent. Nevertheless, Morton accepted the task, and threw himself into the campaign with his accustomed vigor. He challenged his opponent, Marquette, to a series of joint debates;⁴² the challenge was accepted, and together they stumped the territory.

The *Omaha Herald* said that Morton's "reputation for extremism" was greater than he deserved, and hoped that during the campaign he would be able to prove to the people that he was much more conservative in his opinions than was generally believed.⁴³ Morton, however, was not inclined to moderate his views for the sake of votes. The prime issue as he saw it was still negro suffrage, which, he declared, entered in some form into all the measures of the Radical party, and made that party a menace to popular government. Related to negro suffrage was the Freedmen's Bureau, which Morton denounced as "an outrage upon the white population of the country . . . [expending] \$20,000,000 per annum on the education, clothing and feeding of the niggers, while nothing whatever is being done for whites who are equally poor."⁴⁴

With such statements to aid them, the Republicans did not find it difficult to keep alive the impression that Morton was still an extremist, and instead of bothering to answer his arguments, they

⁴¹ Morton-Watkins, I:543-546.

⁴² *Nebraska City News*, September 22, 1866.

⁴³ *Omaha Herald*, September 1866.

⁴⁴ *Nebraska City News*, October 6, 1866.

contented themselves with heaping personal abuse upon him and charging that he could think of nothing but "Nigger, Nigger."⁴⁵ Add to this the cry of "Copperhead" and the charge that Democrats would put unrepentant rebels in the saddle in the South, and there was little else they needed to do.

As had the June election, the September campaign resulted in victory for the Republicans, and this time it was more decided than it had been before. Taffe defeated Paddock for congressman, 4,760 to 4,072; Marquette worsted Morton by a vote of 4,864 to 4,096.⁴⁶

"I am afraid you are beat again," Miller wrote, even before the final result was known. "God knows how sorry I am at the result. . . . I am trying to keep up a feeling of good spirits in the Herald, but this is a sad day for us, and I feel the whole weight of it on your account and on our own. I am afraid you are injured for that future which has hitherto been so promising."⁴⁷

The Congress, reconsidering the question of statehood for Nebraska, imposed the fundamental condition that there should be "no denial of suffrage for reasons of color." The state and territorial legislatures elected in the October 9th election met in February to consider the question, and passed an act bringing the constitution into harmony with the wishes of Congress. On March 1, 1867, President Johnson issued a proclamation declaring Nebraska to be a State, after Congress had admitted her over his veto.

Morton accepted statehood as something that could not be avoided, and with just a trace of irony wrote in the *News* of the benefits that would accrue:

. . . Taxes will be low. The price of labor will be high. Flush times will drive out lean times, wealth will be the rule and poverty the exception among our people. And the total expense of this beneficent change will not exceed, remember according to the eloquent advocates of Statehood who perambulated Nebraska and harangued her people during the pleasant months of May and June, 1866, the inconsiderable sum of twelve thousand dollars each year.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cf. *Nebraska Herald* (Plattsmouth), October 3, 1866.

⁴⁶ Morton-Watkins, I:546.

⁴⁷ Miller to Morton, October 10, 1866.

⁴⁸ *Nebraska City News*, March 9, 1867.

The problem of statehood having been finally settled, Morton early turned his attention to the forthcoming presidential election of 1868. From the beginning, George H. Pendleton of Ohio, who had aided him in his fight against Daily in 1862, was his choice for the Democratic nomination. Over a year before the convention was to meet, he declared in the *News*: “. . . Among the many logical and forcible reasoners of the Democratic party, there is none that excells Mr. Pendleton, nor is there any one among them who will make a better Candidate for President of the United States in 1868.”⁴⁹

Pendleton, in turn, was anxious for Morton's support. He even offered to include a plank on negro suffrage in the platform, if Morton insisted upon it.⁵⁰

In Pendleton's mind, however, the issue that would do the most to nominate and elect him was the one revolving about the redemption of the bonds issued to finance the Civil War. According to Pendleton, and the “Ohio Idea,” the bonds should be redeemed not in coin, but in greenbacks. This, it was claimed, was perfectly legal, for, although the law required that the interest should be paid in coin, it provided that the principal should be payable in “dollars,” which, after the passage of the legal tender act, included greenbacks. Inasmuch as gold was worth from 132 to 150, it was argued that payments in coin would be a foolish excess of generosity and a discrimination in favor of the bondholders.⁵¹ This argument, combined with emphasis upon the fact that the bonds were largely held by rich financiers of the Eastern states, had great influence in the West.

Pendleton recognized that his advocacy of the “Ohio Idea” would work to his detriment in the East. “Our New York friends—the bondholders,” he wrote to Morton, “. . . are zealous. They are operating on our friends in the South. They say, ‘Pendleton was a copperhead—a most excellent man—our choice for President—but he cannot win. We must gain two hundred thousand Republicans, in order to do this we must take a war man, perfectly sound but not

⁴⁹ May 18, 1867.

⁵⁰ Pendleton to Morton, December 3, 1867.

⁵¹ Rhodes, *History of the United States, 1850–1877*, VI:160–161.

subject to cry of disloyalty. You southern people must yourselves say that we ought to take such a man.' . . ."

The Westerners could win out over this opposition, he felt, "only if we agree in good faith to stand firmly together, on the doctrine which has given us strength, and to be opposed to everybody who is opposed to it." It was of importance to solidify their Western strength to such an extent that every effort to break the line in the convention would prove futile.

"This," Pendleton wrote, "can best be done by warming up on the 'greenback issue.' That takes hold on our people—that promises relief—that affords common ground on which war and anti-war men may stand without 'going back' on their past actions."

This "warming up," he felt, could most easily be effected by the newspapers; and in order to "give tone to the papers and to infuse vigor into the men," he urged Morton to take a trip through Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Michigan to talk with the editors of those states: "You would communicate to them new ideas and new information and thus set up a chain of sympathy between them. Your position as a leading western man, a politician, and editor and a delegate would enable you to make the trip without exciting the least suspicion that you had any other business than to recruit your health and see the country. I think you could thus do great immediate good and gain an acquaintance which would be of great service at New York."⁵²

Though Morton espoused the "Ohio Idea" vigorously in the *News* and urged Pendleton's nomination, he was unable to make the trip suggested. He had suffered from a serious attack of erysipelas in January,⁵³ and had not yet recovered his strength sufficiently for such an arduous journey. Pendleton did not press the matter, yet he wanted to be sure that Morton felt that he absolutely could not go: ". . . Let us be frank; if you cannot make the trip I suggested . . . do not think of it again, and I will appreciate your action fully and have no further word to say. But if you are deterred by any delicacy in drawing for expenses, or any feeling that perhaps the expenditure may be unnecessary or useless *do not hesitate an instant*. The work ought to be done—it may decide the question. The firmness

⁵² Pendleton to Morton, April 26, 1868.

⁵³ *Omaha Herald*, January 9, 1868.

of the Northwest will decide it. No man can do it so well, under all the circumstances as you. I know perfectly what I am about."⁵⁴

Pendleton, after receiving a letter from Wilbur F. Storey, editor of the *Chicago Times*, warning him that there was danger that the Michigan convention would not instruct, telegraphed Morton to attend that state's convention if it were physically possible.⁵⁵ Storey had declared that while the majority of the sentiment was for Pendleton, it was inactive, and that there was "a considerable class of fogies and another of softs, who question whether you [Pendleton] are as strong as a less positive Democrat would be, and these urge that delegates should go to New York uninstructed."⁵⁶

Pendleton thought that Morton, by his presence in the convention of his home state, could overcome the objections of these men.⁵⁷ Despite his poor health, Morton made the journey and attended the convention. His mission, however, was not successful. Michigan, instead of favoring Pendleton at the New York convention, threw her eight votes away on Reverdy Johnson until the fifth ballot when she shifted to Hendricks.⁵⁸

After returning from Michigan, Morton found himself again in poor health, and expressed fears that he would not be able to go to New York in July for the national convention. This disturbed Pendleton greatly.

"I cannot become reconciled to your absence from New York," he wrote. "The fight upon me will be very severe and made chiefly with a view of breaking our western line. In preventing this you could do very much. Still if your health will suffer, even though you make the trip by slow stages, I could not ask you to go on. I shall be grieved at your absence however necessary I may think it."⁵⁹

Well Pendleton might have been concerned, for though the Nebraska delegation was instructed for him, George L. Miller, who after Morton was the leader of the group, let it be generally known that he preferred Horatio Seymour of New York, even though he

⁵⁴ Pendleton to Morton, May 9, 1868.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, May 23, 1868.

⁵⁶ Storey to Pendleton, May 21, 1868.

⁵⁷ Pendleton to Morton, May 23, 1868.

⁵⁸ *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, held at New York, July 4-9, 1868* (Boston, 1868), 75, 86.

⁵⁹ Pendleton to Morton, June 20, 1868.

was not a candidate, to the young Ohioan.⁶⁰ Pendleton knew that with Morton absent from the convention and Miller in complete control, it would be easy to "break the western line" at Nebraska.

By July, Morton's health had recovered enough to allow him to make the trip, and on July 1, in the company of Mrs. Morton and the Nebraska delegation, he left Omaha for New York. In the convention, Nebraska's delegates stood by Pendleton for thirteen ballots, but on the fourteenth, feeling that his case was hopeless, cast their united vote for Senator Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana. They voted for Hendricks until Ohio switched to Seymour, when they fell into line in right order for the unanimous choice of the convention.⁶¹

Home from the convention, Morton entered vigorously into the state and national campaigns. The Democrats of Otoe County nominated him as their candidate for state senator, but he declined to make the race in order that he might be free to leave the county to campaign for the state ticket.⁶² The activities of Governor Butler, which were to result eventually in his impeachment, were beginning to smell in Democratic nostrils, and Morton sensed that he had in the Governor a target at which he could aim his most poisonous shafts. He stumped the territory with James R. Porter, the Democratic candidate for governor, and A. J. Poppleton, who was running for Congress. At every town he concentrated on Radical corruption and extravagance.⁶³ In addition, the columns of *The News* were filled with denunciation of the Governor. Interspersed with long accounts of the alleged "land steals" were short barbed quips on the Governor's personal habits.⁶⁴

So prominent was Morton in the campaign, that one might gather from reading the Republican journals that he rather than Porter was running against Butler. Morton exulted in this attention: "There is nothing which we prize so highly as continued villification by all the blowhards, thieves and dirty scoundrels of the ruling ring of the radical party in this State. It is the highest testimony to our fidelity to the great Democratic Party of the nation that we can

⁶⁰ *Omaha Herald*, January 22, 1868.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, July 22, 1868.

⁶² *Nebraska City News*, August 19, 21, September 2, 1868.

⁶³ *Omaha Herald*, August 26, 1868; *Nebraska City News*, September 2, 1868.

⁶⁴ *Nebraska City News*, August 15, September 23, 1868.

possibly produce before the rank and file of the grand army of Constitutional Liberty. . . ."⁶⁵

Regardless of how much brilliance and effort they brought to the campaign, the Democrats could do little to prevent the outcome from being anything but a repetition of the story of the preceding contests. Republicans won everywhere in Nebraska, and once again the Democrats tasted bitterly of defeat.

The leaders of the party seemed to feel that the defeat was final, that it signified the end of any hope for the Democracy in the nation at large, as well as in Nebraska. They all felt a revulsion against politics and despondence over the future. Poppleton wrote: "For myself I am unable to grieve at the result as I know I am better off in my office & at my business, but I am sorry to see the State turned over to the radicals, bound hand & foot, for I know they will fleece it of the last dollar. . . ."⁶⁶

Dr. Miller felt that he would "wear out" in ten years, and said that he was educating himself "out of all political aspiration."⁶⁷

Morton then considered leaving Nebraska to the Republicans and going South, but thought better of it. Instead, he followed the oft-expressed wish of his wife to abstain from further political activity. After the defeat of 1868 he dropped out of active politics, and though his name was often associated in the press with the Democratic Party, it was more than a decade before he again entered the ranks of active partisans. At the age of thirty-six, he was a senior member of the Democratic Party in Nebraska. He retired for twelve years to the life of an influential private citizen.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, August 24, 1868.

⁶⁶ Poppleton to Morton, October 21, 1868.

⁶⁷ Miller to Morton, November 17, 1868.

PART THREE

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BACKGROUND FOR ARBOR DAY

FROM THE SPRING OF 1855 when Morton "took up" the quarter section of land on which he was to make his home, agriculture was an important part of his life. To be sure, he was never a "dirt farmer" in the sense that he occupied himself often with the labor of the farm; nor was farming ever his sole occupation. Yet he considered himself always a farmer, and farm life held for him, even as a young man, the highest satisfactions.

The sod first was broken on his farm in the early summer of 1855. Thus he participated in the earliest experiment in practical agriculture made on a general scale in Nebraska. When in later years, discussing the development of the state, he spoke of the "intense anxiety" experienced by the tillers of the soil in 1855, he knew well of what he spoke.

During the early territorial years, Morton's political activities often took him away from the farm for long periods of time, and he appears to have been unable to give it much personal supervision, even, having to content himself with reports from the "hired man." These, if uncertain in spelling, were explicit in content. The following will attest:

Dear Sir as you are not a coming home as soon as I Should like to have yo I will let yo know how things is hear the read cow had a fine Bull calf last wednesday morning and Dol had a fine mare coalt this morning Head and tail up the corn looks fine I must finnish that fens this week there is more in the feald than it can keep very long I will hav the lumber all down their to morrow the

fead is all gon we will hav to by som corn Tasit is agoing to Sell Hawk 100 bushels at 30 cents per bushel if yo want any at that prise let me know to morrow night The Folks is all well come home as soon as yo can No More So Good By. . . .¹

When he was at home, however, considerations of his pioneer farm occupied much of Morton's time. His diary, while by no means solely a journal of the farm, records much of what occurred about the place. Often the entries show the farmer's literary bent, as well as his enthusiasm for the rural life. Sausage making in 1866, for example, was the "making of many sausages of 'linked sweetness long drawn out.' . . ."²

From the beginning, the planting of trees was a primary consideration, and early Morton began to beautify the prairie land about his home with both fruit and forest trees, and to experiment with various types and varieties to find those that would do the best in the soil and climate of Nebraska. Unfortunately, no exact record of this early activity has been left. How well it succeeded is best told, perhaps, in an account of a visit to the farm in the spring of 1868, by Morton's good friend, Dr. George L. Miller:

. . . Our visit with Mr. Morton and his family was a constant delight to us. His hospitalities are always dispensed to friends so heartily, his home is made such to guests so thoroughly, that a visit at the Morton "Ranche," as he prefers to call it, is always a rare enjoyment. His home is that of a real farmer and the topics of farming are never left without discussion with visitors. Mr. Morton's residence is adjacent to the town. It stands on a commanding elevation, and from its ample portico, charming views of the town and country are beheld in all directions, whilst the farm itself bears the most gratifying evidence of Mr. Morton's early appreciation of what was needed to make it yield the solid as well as the luxurious comforts of Home. His orchards, numbering hundreds of apple trees, remind one of those a century old in the East. When we were there rich blossoms of the coming fruit gladdened our vision, and the fragrance that perfumed the whole air of the Peach, the Plum, the Pear and the Apple Trees, hundreds in number, were most grateful to our senses. All around that splendid farm may be seen proof of the constancy with which Mr. Morton has given direction to fruit and tree culture. He is constantly sticking the "cuttings" or roots of fruit or forest trees into the ground. When he is not doing this, in the proper season he is using a pair of shears ingeniously fastened on a long pole and operated with a string, in trimming the limbs of the tall trees, which his own hand planted, that have grown out of his reach. One of these, the king of

¹ Morton Mss.

² Diary, January 5, 1866.

Cottonwoods, which arose from a few inches of a limb of one of those trees, standing South of his house, is about 12 years of age. It stands forty feet in its subterranean stockings, and measures at the butt 60 inches in circumference! But his fruit-growing is the great thing. He already raises peaches for market, and his apples will be counted this Fall by hundreds of bushels. . . .³

Dr. Miller may have been a bit carried away by his enthusiasm—for the preceding year Morton had raised but fifty bushels of apples on 300 trees.⁴ Yet the Morton "Ranche" was indeed a symbol of the productive possibilities of the climate and soil of southeastern Nebraska.

More outstanding in the service of pioneer agriculture than the work on his own farm, was the zeal with which Morton spread agricultural information and promoted agricultural advancement.

He early made attempts to convince his fellow citizens of the importance of agriculture, and to impress them with the dignity of rural life. Speaking at the First Territorial Fair in 1859, he said: "Manufacture and skill in the various arts, may, and will undoubtedly, aid us in our pursuit of a glorious and independent opulence, but our great trust and strong hope is still hidden in the fertility of our soil and its adaptation to general cultivation."

He urged the farmers in his audience to be proud of their calling, for in it there was "no possibility of guile or fraud, and for his partners in labor God has sent him the genial sunshine, gentle rains, and softly descending dews."

The young man of twenty-six who was addressing the farmers of territorial Nebraska also urged upon them the necessity for diligent study to improve both methods and products, and deplored the fact that "agriculture, although it is the art supportive of all arts—although it is the basis and foundation upon which the superstructure of all the commerce of the world is reared—is less studied, less thought of, and more remote from its perfection than all others."⁵

Again in 1871, in the dedicatory address delivered at the opening of the University of Nebraska, he reminded his audience that "One

³ *Omaha Herald*, May 13, 1868.

⁴ *Nebraska City News*, October 28, 1867.

⁵ Morton, "Territorial Fair Address," 11.

of the grandest of material labors is the reduction of untried lands to tillage."

As an editor, Morton was constant in his advocacy of an improved agriculture. The "boiler plate" copy of all rural newspapers quite naturally contained general articles on farming, but Morton was not content with these, and filled his editorial columns with advice and prophecy on agricultural matters, applying specifically to Nebraska and Otoe County.

At times his exuberance carried him a bit far afield, as when he wrote, after "Uncle Billy Hall" had shown him a specimen of tobacco raised near Nebraska City: ". . . it is easy to see that the farmer who will plant tobacco and tend it well, in this territory, must make large and profitable crops. We will expect tobacco and hemp to become staple products of Nebraska before ten years more have passed away." ⁶

Such a statement, erroneous though it may have been, was not at all out of line with the thinking of an era which imagined not only that any new soil would produce all things desirable in profusion, but also that in it lay untold mineral wealth. On the whole, Morton's observations, in the light of years, seem eminently sound and conservative. He praised County Commissioner Oliver Stevenson, for example, for bringing seed potatoes with him upon his return from a trip to Pennsylvania: "If every Nebraskan who visits the East would look after matters of this kind, and emulate Mr. Stevenson by introducing new and improved kinds of grains, vegetables and fruits the whole State would be much benefitted."⁷

The most enthusiastic agricultural accounts in the *News*, however, were those in praise of tree planting. Every farmer in the territory managed to raise some sort of a grain crop, but the dearth of trees was evident along every road, and every village street. The farmers of Otoe County were among the first to recognize the importance of planting trees, and Morton used their success as the occasion for many an article. Soon after reassuming editorial work in 1865 he described in some detail the various groves in Otoe County, to demonstrate "the fact that sufficient timber can be

⁶ *Nebraska City News*, February 2, 1867.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 31, 1867.

grown upon a quarter section of Prairie Land in the course of six years, to furnish the dweller thereupon a bountiful supply of firewood, and yet leave him One Hundred and Twenty Acres of prairie to cultivate. . . ."⁸

The *News* did not confine its efforts to the encouragement of prospective tree planters, but frequently gave advice, based upon the editor's own study and experience, as in August 1869, when fruit trees were observed to have made "so strong and swift a growth" during the summer that they were "in greater danger than ever before, in Nebraska, of winter killing." To prevent this Morton advised "a severe cutting back of the leading branches during the month of September." He had tried this plan in his own orchard and found it "a certain preventative of winter killing." He declared: "Unless this is pretty generally tried in Nebraska this fall, we shall expect to hear a pretty general wail over deceased fruit trees next spring."⁹

Another editor, equally zealous in the cause of pioneer agriculture and tree planting, was Robert W. Furnas of the *Brownville Advertiser*. Though bitter political enemies, the two men were united in their belief that Nebraska could be made a great agricultural and horticultural state. George L. Miller, who claimed that he also was a farmer-editor, "as zealous . . . if not . . . as good" as the others, declared that to Morton and Furnas the Territory of Nebraska owed "no small obligation for the persistent efforts they have made with their respective journals to promulgate knowledge to all the world of our agricultural resources, and to give intelligent direction to their development. . . ."

He went on to write:

Messrs. Morton and Furnas have not been merely newspaper workers in agriculture. Both are practical farmers. Nor is Mr. Morton's record confined to ordinary farming. It is historically connected with the improvement of many kinds of stock. When an old Illinois farmer said the other day in Nebraska City, that Otoe County produced the fattest hogs he had ever seen, he was unwittingly paying a high compliment to J. Sterling Morton, who first introduced the Suffolk breed into that county, at great personal outlay and inconvenience to himself. So of other kinds of stock. The Cashmere goat is known in Nebraska only through R. W. Furnas, whilst both gentlemen have given to agriculture, to

⁸ *Ibid.*, September 2, 1865.

⁹ *Ibid.*, August 7, 1869.

horticulture, and to all farming interests, the steady influence of their enlightened patronage. . . .¹⁰

The territorial pioneers early were convinced of the importance of an organization to promote the farming interest of Nebraska, and in a meeting at the Herndon House in Omaha, October 30, 1858, a Board of Agriculture was organized. Robert W. Furnas was elected president; A. D. Jones of Omaha, secretary; and John M. Thayer, treasurer.¹¹ Morton, who was secretary of the territory at the time, was not on the board, but was chosen to deliver the address at the first territorial fair to be held in Nebraska City, September 21-23, 1859.

The first fair was looked upon as a success. There was a good crowd, despite the hard times which made many at a distance feel they could not incur the expense of attending, and the fact that the regular steamboat packets were out of order—one sunk, and the other fast on a sand bar—thus cutting off all travel on the river.¹² Furnas reported to the legislature: “. . . The display in the various departments of agriculture, manufactures, arts, stock &c., was highly creditable; and although limited in number were unsurpassed in quality especially as to horses, cattle, swine, grain and vegetables. That the utility of such exhibitions is not overrated even in this new country was fully manifested from the interest and general satisfaction expressed by the very respectable concourse of citizens in attendance from the various portions of the Territory, and in fact from abroad. . . .”¹³

Morton, in addition to making the principal address, won three premiums: ten dollars for the best blooded stallion over four years old; ten dollars for the best draught stallion over four years old; and five dollars for the best Suffolk boar, one year old.¹⁴

When Nebraska was admitted to the Union, the Territorial Board of Agriculture became the State Board, and with the funds put at its disposal by the state legislature, increased its efforts. The State Fair

¹⁰ *Omaha Herald*, April 8, May 13, 1868.

¹¹ Robert W. Furnas, *President's Report, Board of Agriculture* (Omaha City, 1860), 5. (Public Document, House of Representatives, Sixth Session, Nebraska Legislature.)

¹² *Nebraska Advertiser*, September 29, 1859.

¹³ Furnas, *President's Report* . . . , *loc. cit.*, 3-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

became an annual institution, with the various towns vying for the privilege of holding it.

Of the third annual State Fair, held at Nebraska City in 1869, Morton wrote that the display of apples, apricots, pears, plums, peaches, cherries, quinces, and other varieties of small fruits "was splendid" and would "forever silence the croakers who have declared Nebraska not a fruit growing State."¹⁵

Indicative of the increasing interest in fruit growing was the organization, at the State Fair in 1869, of the Nebraska State Horticultural Society. Twenty-three men, including Morton, were among the charter members. J. H. Masters, a Nebraska City orchardist, was elected president; Robert W. Furnas, secretary; and Chief Justice Oliver P. Mason, treasurer.¹⁶

The meetings of the Horticultural Society usually were held in connection with those of the State Board of Agriculture, inasmuch as several men were members of both groups. Judging from the minutes of its meetings, the Horticultural Society was mainly an agency for getting the fruit growers of the state together to share experiences and exchange views. This was important. They had little scientific information. Practical experience was their only reliable guide.

Between meetings they exchanged opinions and information by correspondence. In the spring of 1871, Furnas, learning that Morton had set out a new orchard of a thousand trees, wrote: "Your selection is good in the main *as far as it goes*. I cannot see how you could plant an orchard in 1871 and have only one Russian variety and no crabs. You should have had Duchess of Oldenburg, Tetofsky and Stark and at least Soulard, Transendent, Hislop and Hewes crabs. I have planted this Spring one thousand crabs in variety and about (5000) five thousand other fruit trees in orchard. Fifty Thousand evergreens, Ten Thousand Larch, One Hundred Thousand Apple and Pear grafts, Ten Thousand Sugar, Beech and Poplar besides and a host of other trees shrubs and vines too tedious to mention. If you would like a few one year old Duchess of Oldenburg,

¹⁵ *Nebraska City News*, October 9, 1869.

¹⁶ *Organization of the Nebraska State Board of Horticulture* (Des Moines, 1871).

Tetofsky, Stark, Soulard, Transendents, Hislop & Hewes crabs to experiment with I will send them to you.”¹⁷

At the meeting held at Brownville, October 5, 1871, a resolution was passed appointing Morton, “a committee to prepare and publish an address to the people of the State setting forth all important facts relative to fruit growing in Nebraska.”¹⁸

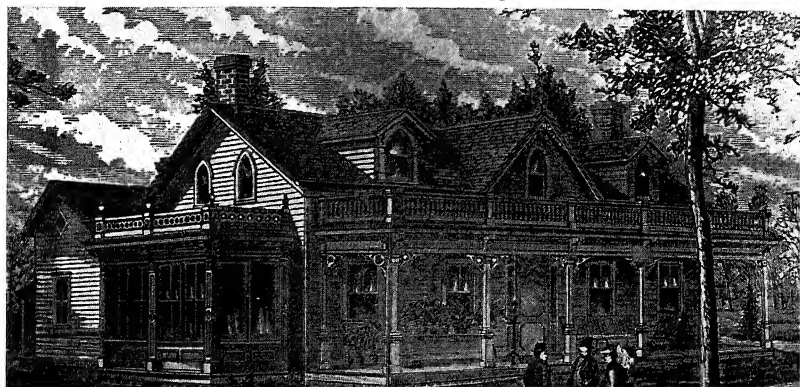
Morton often had been called upon to express the sentiment of various groups. Usually his subject had been political and the result had been a polemic in the most vigorous language. He brought the same vigor of expression to the less controversial subject of fruit culture, and did not confine himself to a listing of the fruit that could be produced in Nebraska, but also gave advice on fruit growing. He included these facts, to be sure, but was at his best in singing the praises of Nebraska as a fruit growing region, and urging the necessity of more fruit trees in the state.

“That soil and climate which will produce good crops of corn and wheat,” he began, “will grow apples or pears, if they are given careful attention and judicious culture. But in a new State, like Nebraska, there are many men ready to proclaim what *can not* be produced, where there is only one who will endeavor, by rational experiment, to demonstrate what *can be* produced. . . .”

He went on to state that fruit growing in southeastern Nebraska had proved “eminently successful,” and pointed to the highest premiums awarded Nebraska apples and pears by the American Pomological Society in 1871 as facts which destroyed the theory that the western prairies would not grow fruit. Much of the prevailing prejudice against Nebraska as a fruit growing area, he thought, resulted from experience with trees brought in from a distance and planted in the Nebraska soil. These, he said, were not worth the cost of transportation: “An experience of fourteen or fifteen years has expensively taught this knowledge to all the original orchardists of Nebraska; and ‘far bought’ trees are, in the main, directly responsible for the vast amount of hearsay relative to this State, as a fruit growing portion of the Union, which has been promulgated so much to the delay of its settlement and improvement. . . .”

¹⁷ Furnas to Morton, April 20, 1871.

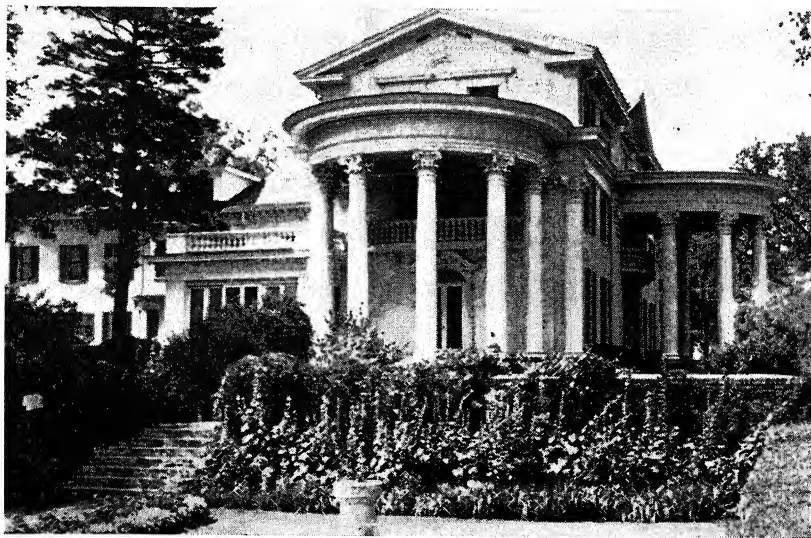
¹⁸ *Transactions, Nebraska State Horticultural Society*, 1871, 17.



EVOLUTION OF ARBOR LODGE
TOP, 1860, CENTER, 1879; BOTTOM, 1890



ARBOR LODGE AS IT LOOKS TODAY



He closed the "Address" with what is one of the best of his many expressions in praise of tree planting:

There is beauty in a well ordered orchard which is a "joy forever." It is a blessing to him who plants it, and it perpetuates his name and memory, keeping fresh as the fruit it bears long after he has ceased to live. There is comfort in good orchard, in that it makes the new home more like the "old home in the east," and with its thrifty growth and large luscious fruits, sows contentment in the mind of a family as the clouds scatter the rain. Orchards are missionaries of culture and refinement. They make the people among whom they grow a better and more thoughtful people. If every farmer in Nebraska will plant out and cultivate an orchard and a flower garden, together with a few forest trees, this will become mentally and morally the best agricultural State, the grandest community of producers in the American Union. Children reared among trees and flowers growing up with them will be better in mind and in heart, than children reared among hogs and cattle. The occupations and surroundings of boys and girls make them, to a great extent, either bad and coarse, or good and gentle.

If I had the power I would compel every man in the State who had a home of his own, to plant out and cultivate fruit trees.¹⁹

Morton presented his "Fruit Address" to the Horticultural Society in Lincoln, January 4, 1872. Also meeting in Lincoln on January 4, was the State Board of Agriculture. Morton, a member of both organizations, attended both meetings. At the meeting of the State Board of Agriculture he offered the following resolution:

Resolved, That Wednesday, the 10th day of April, 1872, be, and the same is hereby, especially set apart and consecrated for tree planting in the State of Nebraska, and the State Board of Agriculture hereby name it Arbor Day; and to urge upon the people of the State the vital importance of tree planting, hereby offer a special premium of one hundred dollars to the agricultural society of that county in Nebraska which shall, upon that day, plant properly the largest number of trees; and a farm library of twenty-five dollars' worth of books to that person who, on that day, shall plant properly, in Nebraska, the greatest number of trees.

There was some discussion regarding the name. A few of the members of the Board thought that "Sylvan Day" would be more appropriate than the name given in the resolution. Morton concluded, however, that "Sylvan Day" technically would refer only to forest trees, while "Arbor Day" would refer to fruit trees as well.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-22.

The resolution was adopted unanimously as its author had offered it.²⁰

Other men in the state had given thought to the problem of the treeless plains—Robert W. Furnas, J. H. Masters, and O. P. Mason, to name but three of the most prominent. There were others who had gone more deeply into the problems of arboriculture than had Morton. Surely Furnas, who operated a large nursery, and who was active as an officer of both the horticultural and agricultural societies, had done so. Yet, it is fitting that Morton should have evolved the idea which more than any other was to popularize the planting of trees. He not only understood the need; he had the facility for hitting upon the happy phrase, the idea that was sure to take hold. It was the same type of person who conceived the idea of setting aside a special day for the planting of trees, who, as an editor, had referred to “the campaign for tree planting,” and the “grand army of husbandmen” who were to “battle against the timberless prairies.”²¹

Arbor Day began inauspiciously. It was simply one of a number of efforts to encourage the planting of trees in barren Nebraska. The State Board of Agriculture had offered a prize of \$50 for the best and largest grove of timber planted in 1870, and \$25 for the second best and largest. They also offered \$15 as a prize for the best orchard and row of hedges planted during the same year. The State Horticultural Society was organized expressly for the purpose of furthering the cause of tree culture in Nebraska. The society had recommended the cooperative system to the settlers in the purchase of fruit trees, shrubs, and vines, and had suggested that the county agricultural and horticultural association appoint some suitable person to act as agent for each county in procuring, on the best terms possible, necessary supplies. Also in the year of the first Arbor Day celebration, the State Boards of Horticulture and Agriculture each appointed two members to work together to prepare and present an address to the National Agricultural Convention asking for

²⁰ N. H. Egleston, *Arbor Day—Its History and Observance* (Washington, 1896), 14.

²¹ *Nebraska City News*, March 12, 1870.

government aid in the encouragement of tree planting on the western prairies.²²

Morton was at Lincoln on the third and fourth of January attending agricultural and horticultural meetings, but his diary makes no mention either of the "Fruit Address" or the Arbor Day resolution. The event worth recording on the fourth was: "Visit penitentiary with Judge Mason and Gov. James & take tea with Warden Campbell. We were much pleased with the management."

Great preparations were made at the Morton farm for the celebration of the first Arbor Day. Eight hundred trees were ordered, but by April 10 they had not yet arrived, and the author of Arbor Day was denied a part in its first celebration. "But," he wrote in his diary, "they will come soon & then I will put them out."

Morton wrote a letter to the *Omaha Daily Herald* on the occasion of the first Arbor Day. It was a reflective discussion on trees and their relation to human life and the passage of time. It shows that the author of Arbor Day had formulated definite ideas upon its potentialities:

Trees grow in time. The poorest landowner in Nebraska has just as large a fortune, of time, secured to him, as has the richest. And the rain and sunshine and seasons will be his partners, just as genially and gently as they will be those of any millionaire, and will make the trees planted by the poor man grow just as grandly and beautifully as those planted by the opulent. . . .

There is no aristocracy in trees. They are not haughty. They will thrive near the humblest cabin, on our fertile prairies, just as well, and become just as refreshing to the eye and as fruitful as they will in the shadow of a king's palace.

The wealthiest and most powerful potentate on earth cannot hire one to speed its growths or bear fruit before its time. There is a true triumph in the unswerving integrity and genuine democracy of trees, for they refuse to be influenced by money or social position and thus tower morally, as well as physically, high above Congressmen and many other patriots of this dollaring age.

Then what infinite beauty and loveliness we can add to the pleasant plains of Nebraska by planting forest and fruit trees upon every swell of their voluptuous undulations and, in another short decade, make her the Orchard of the Union, the Sylvan queen of the Republic. . . .

A collection of inanimate marbles may, for a few years, preserve the name, and entry, and exit on this stage in life's short play. But how much more enduring are the animate trees of our own planting. They grow and self-perpetuate themselves, and shed yearly blessings on our race. Trees are the monuments I

²² Verne S. Sweedlun, "A History of the Evolution of Agriculture in Nebraska, 1870-1930" (Ms., University of Nebraska Library), 58.

would have and in their yearly tribute of emerald foliage, variegated flowers and blushing fruit, I would find my most acceptable panegyric.

Thus we come to a benediction on the institution of Arbor Day in Nebraska. May it become a joy forever, and its anniversary be perpetuated in the constantly increasing blessings which its faithful observance is absolutely certain to bestow. May all the people strive on that day to plant, in Nebraska, many, many trees, both forest and fruit. May the day and the observance thereof be cherished in every household in the State forever, and its name and fruits become as a shower of blessings to the long lines of generations who shall succeed us in the short, quick trip which all humanity must make, from the cradle to the grave.

The cultivation of flowers and trees is the cultivation of the good, the beautiful, and the ennobling in man, and for one, I wish to see this culture become universal in the State.²³

So well had the idea taken hold of the people of Nebraska that on the first Arbor Day over one million trees were planted in the state.²⁴ Clearly Arbor Day had more than a sentimental value.

There is no record that Arbor Day was celebrated in 1873, but in 1874, the State Board of Agriculture passed a resolution making the day an annual occurrence, and designated the second Wednesday in April of each year as such. The governor also memorialized to call attention to the day each year by an official proclamation which would request the people of the state to plant "forest, fruit, and ornamental trees."²⁵

It was appropriate that Robert W. Furnas, who just after he had been elected, wrote Morton, "Now the election is over let us 'talk tree' again,"²⁶ was the Governor to issue the first proclamation.

The second Wednesday in April 1874, fell on April 8, and on that day Morton noted in his diary: "*Arbor Day*, an invention of mine, now become a public holiday, destined to become a blessing to posterity as well as to ourselves. It is devoted to tree planting & premiums are given to the largest planter by State Board of Agriculture. On the Morton place, today, two Hundred Elms Ash & Linden trees are set out on East Line and East Avenue. . . ."

The prognosis was correct. The day was destined to become a blessing. It also was destined to grow in favor and in popularity. From that time forward the story of that growth is a part of the story of the man who gave the idea to the world.

²³ April 17, 1872.

²⁴ Eggleston, *op. cit.*, 14.

²⁵ Sweedlun, *op. cit.*, 62.

²⁶ Furnas to Morton, October 22, 1873.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HURRAH FOR THE IRON HORSE

IN THE LATE SIXTIES, eastern Nebraska was enjoying the bustle of a railroad boom. To be sure, not many teams had yet been frightened by the shrill whistle of the locomotive as it clattered along at twenty miles an hour. Yet the railroad had arrived. The Union Pacific, magic band that was to unite the East and the West, had stretched its rails eight hundred miles west of Omaha, well beyond the farthest fringe of settlement. Away out on the plains it had set up the rowdy little town of North Platte. From there its rugged Irishmen pushed its tracks unceasingly toward the sunset.

The Union Pacific had made Omaha the gateway to the West, had assured her of that pre-eminence in Western affairs which for more than a decade had been fought for by all the river settlements. The men of the other towns were not downcast. They saw that the railroad was to do more than stretch in a single line across the state, that it was to spread into a net that would touch every lively town. They must needs get busy.

Nebraska City had long been conscious of the importance of transportation. In 1858, when the government contracted with Russell, Majors, and Waddell to freight supplies across the plains to General Johnston's army in Utah, and stipulated that because of the enormous quantities of goods to be handled another depot in addition to Fort Leavenworth should be provided,¹ the citizens of Nebraska City

¹ Alexander Majors, *Seventy Years on the Frontier* (Chicago, 1893), 75.

exerted every influence to have their town selected. When they were successful, they held a celebration, passed "appropriate resolutions," and listened to "eloquent and thrilling speeches . . . by Judges Black and Kinney, Morton, and others."

At that time, the fact that Omaha had got the capital still rankled in every breast,² but observing that economic considerations would outweigh political ones, the *News* could confidently proclaim: "Fraud located the Seat of Government of Nebraska at Omaha and gave that place a temporary advantage over all others in the Territory; but the shrewd judgment of sagacious and careful businessmen . . . has finally secured for NEBRASKA CITY a prominence and prospects for the future unquestionably fairer than those of any other point in the Territory."³

And well they might have gloated, for Mr. Majors, after the arrangements were completed, declared that the firm would start from Nebraska City between eight hundred and one thousand wagons, and would require from six to eight thousand yoke of oxen.⁴

Business boomed. The uphill grade of Nebraska City's main street was pulverized by the grinding of heavy wheels. New buildings went up. A second paper, *The People's Press*, was started. Thomas Morton, the publisher of the *News*, went East to trade some Iowa land for improvements to meet the competition.⁵ Morton, anticipating the city's growth, subdivided eighty acres west of town into residential lots,⁶ and offered twenty acres on which to build a university.⁷ Simpson Hargus built a four-story hotel and called it the "Morton House," after the Secretary of the territory.⁸ Business developed steadily, and Nebraska City became one of the important shipping points of the West. Each month during the time of year when shipping was possible, hundreds of the heavy

² See pp. 56-59; 66-69.

³ *Nebraska City News*, February 27, 1858.

⁴ *Ibid.*, March 13, 1858.

⁵ Thomas Morton to Morton, January 29, 1859.

⁶ *Nebraska City News*, March 20, 1858.

⁷ William L. Boydston to Morton, February 11, 1859.

⁸ *Nebraska Daily News-Press*, November 14, 1939. In 1863 or 1864 John Seymour bought the hotel and named it the "Seymour House," but was unsuccessful financially. In 1883 the Nebraska City Hotel Company was formed and the hostelry was reopened in 1884 as the "Morton House," this time for Morton's second son, Paul, who was assistant general freight agent of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

wagons, each loaded with five thousand pounds of freight, started westward.

During the summer of 1862, great new developments in the freighting business seemed imminent, and an even brighter future appeared to be opening. About the middle of July the river steamer "West Wind" landed a huge locomotive at the Nebraska City levee. General J. R. Brown of Minnesota, the owner, called it a "Steam Wagon" and claimed that it would haul ten tons of freight across the ungraded prairie one hundred miles in twenty-four hours. To Denver in less than a week! The town went wild. The trial runs were eagerly watched. The citizens saw the four wood-burning engines propel the iron giant up from the levee, and out to Kearny Heights. It ran through a freshly plowed garden going up Kearny Hill and was almost stopped, but once through, it forded Table Creek, and ran half a mile on the unbroken sod.⁹

On July 22, it started on its initial trip to Denver, pulling three large wagons each loaded with five thousand pounds of freight. Just a few miles out a crank shaft broke and the trip had to be abandoned as repairs were not available. General Brown left immediately for New York to get the broken parts replaced. Despite the difficulties encountered, it was felt that "the practicability and success of the enterprise" had been proved.¹⁰ The Steam Wagon, however, never moved again under its own power. Sometime in the late Sixties it was dragged to the Morton farm where it stood for almost a decade, and then was sold for junk.¹¹

Rails would have to come before the iron horse.

Morton had always been active in the promotion of the interests of Nebraska City. As a twenty-three year old boy, editing a struggling little newspaper in the second story of the old blockhouse, he had sung the praises of Nebraska City town lots.¹² He had helped to induce Russell, Majors, and Waddell to come to Ne-

⁹ *Nebraska City News*, July 19, 1862.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, August 2, 1862.

¹¹ Charles Boyd Mapes, "The Nebraska City-Fort Kearney Cut-Off as a Factor in the Early Development of Nebraska and the West" (Ms. in University of Nebraska Library), 45.

¹² See pp. 52-54.

braska City. When railroads began to appear feasible in Nebraska, Morton urged their importance with all the power of his pen.

"What are our people doing in the matter of a railway connection with the East?" he asked in October 1865, and answered: "Apparently . . . waiting for other Missouri river towns to make connections, and our men to sink back to primitive insignificance. . . . We are idle, and just so sure as our present apathy continues, while activity above and below us prevails, just so sure will Nebraska City be snubbed by capitalists, and ignored by railroad self-interests." ¹³

After a winter of much discussion, *pro* and *con*, with the *News* taking the lead in urging the necessity of railroads, an election was held on March 17, 1866, for the purpose of submitting to the voters a proposition to authorize the Otoe County Commissioners to issue county bonds not to exceed \$200,000 to secure an Eastern railroad connection. The issue carried overwhelmingly.¹⁴ The *News* rejoiced, but really seemed more excited over the fact that Nebraska City polled four hundred votes more than had Omaha at a recent municipal election, which, the *News* proclaimed, "demonstrates the fact that Nebraska City is the most populous town in the Territory of Nebraska." ¹⁵

Morton wrote confidently of the success of their enterprise: ". . . In eighteen months you can take the cars for Chicago at Nebraska City. We write of what we know. We are confident that our road East will be completed sooner than any road from the Missouri river. . . ." ¹⁶

As the first step in achieving their goal of an early Eastern connection, the Otoe County Commissioners gave \$40,000 of the authorized \$200,000 to the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph Railroad, building north and south along the east bank of the Missouri River. It was stipulated in the gift that the road was to be located within one and one-half miles of the Nebraska City ferry landing, and that it should secure an Eastern connection on or before September 1, 1867.

¹³ *Nebraska City News*, October 14, 1865.

¹⁴ Richard C. Krebs, "Local Aid to Railroads in Southeastern Nebraska to 1875" (Ms. in University of Nebraska Library), 82.

¹⁵ March 23, 1866.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, March 17, 1866.

At that date the Eastern connection was still some months remote, and the road was still seven miles from Nebraska City.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the town was looking to its Western connections. The Midland Pacific was incorporated on October 31, 1867, with the purpose of building westward through Lincoln to join the Union Pacific. Following close upon the organization of the company was that inevitable prelude to western railroad building, a bond election. In a light vote, the citizens of Otoe County authorized the commissioners to issue to the road \$150,000 in county bonds, \$50,000 to be issued by March 1, 1868, and the balance when satisfactory proof was given of the legitimate expenditure of the \$50,000.¹⁸

In addition to asking assistance from public funds, the company was anxious to have citizens subscribe to its capital stock. This Morton heartily approved: ". . . No improvement ever done or thought of would benefit our city and county as much as would the completion of a railroad from Nebraska City *via* Lincoln to intersect at or near Fort Kearny . . . every sensible man . . . will lend a helping hand. . . . It behooves our people to give what assistance and aid they can and cooperate."¹⁹

The people witnessed the first results of their efforts on June 2 when a holiday was declared to celebrate the initial breaking of ground, and the road was started westward with the firing of cannon, music by the cornet band, and speeches by the various honorables of state and city, including the Governor and the Mayor.²⁰

Morton's primary interest, however, was never the Western road, but the long-dreamed-of Eastern connection. When Charles E. Perkins and Henry Strong of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad came to Nebraska in December 1868, to ascertain the advisability of building to the river and into the state, Morton was enthusiastic for the project, and as a "leading citizen," appears to have had much influence upon the decision of the two men to recommend it to the heads of the company.²¹

¹⁷ Krebs, *op. cit.*, 83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

¹⁹ *Nebraska City News*, January 20, 1868; quoted in Krebs, *op. cit.*, 110.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, June 3, 1868.

²¹ Richard C. Overton, *Burlington West* (Cambridge, 1941), 227.

At the same time, Morton was active in arranging a meeting of the citizens to consider with the railroad men the inducements necessary to persuade the Burlington to build to some point on the Missouri River. In this meeting he urged that negotiations be inaugurated for the transfer of the Midland Pacific to the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, thus making it attractive for the latter to build to Nebraska City, and westward from that point. He argued that as the stockholders of the Midland were local men, they would benefit because of the attendant rise in land values and general level of prosperity.

The Midland Pacific, however, would not agree to such a plan. J. B. Bennett, speaking for the company, said that having already graded twelve miles they had done more than the Burlington and Missouri, and had no intention of selling out to that corporation, but "meant business" and intended to complete the road.²²

Though they were unsuccessful in securing the cooperation of the Midland Pacific, the promoters of the Eastern connection had by no means failed. The B. & M. was definitely interested. On January 2, while Morton was busy on his farm supervising the "trying out" of lard, he received a message that Lee Thielson, chief engineer of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, was in town and wanted to see him. He went to town to find that Thielson brought a letter from Perkins and Strong.²³ The letter stated that the two men had been in correspondence with the directors of the company and were authorized to say that they looked with favor upon a connection with Nebraska City:

. . . Of course our Company would expect substantially the usual inducement and guarantee of Right of Way, and means to grade, bridge and tie the Road, with the addition from Fremont County [Iowa] of some satisfactory arrangement in reference to our lands, taxes, &c. . . .

We should expect your proposition put into a *reliable shape* (the details of which might be hereafter adjusted) upon which we may rest a mutual guarantee on our part to build the Road within a time to be stipulated. It rests with you now to obtain or not this guarantee from us. . . .²⁴

²² Krebs, *op. cit.*, 87-89.

²³ Diary, January 2, 1869.

²⁴ Henry Strong and C. E. Perkins to T. R. Stevenson, D. J. McCann, and J. Sterling Morton, December 31, 1868.

This letter brought encouragement. Morton felt that their prospects were good, and that his "long hope" was to be realized.²⁵

He immediately got to work to arrange a favorable proposition. The next day, with D. J. McCann, a Nebraska City banker, and Thielson, he went to Hamburg in his cutter to make arrangements for a railroad meeting. On the following day there was a meeting at McCann's bank, and on the fifth Morton went before the county commissioners on behalf of the B. & M. He was before the commissioners again on the seventh, and on the eleventh, when they agreed to issue \$150,000 in county bonds to the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad.²⁶ It was stipulated that the line should be built from Red Oak *via* Hamburg to a point opposite Nebraska City, within fifty rods of the river, and that it should be new track, not part of the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph.²⁷

Now all that needed to be done was to secure the cooperation of the Iowa people. The railroad officials felt that in addition to right-of-way privileges, they would need a grant of \$75,000.²⁸ Having secured the cooperation of Otoe County, Morton and others from Nebraska City made strenuous efforts to secure that of the Iowans. Meetings were held at Hamburg and Sidney, with Morton, the most convincing of Nebraska's orators, the main speaker at each.

Though an organized effort was being made to complete the project, there were difficulties. It was rumored about that the Burlington and Missouri would reject the proposals of the county commissioners, and that the main line would be run through Plattsmouth.²⁹ There were anxious days for the Nebraska City men who wanted the Eastern connection. In the leading editorial in the *News* of April 10, Morton urged the importance of completing the arrangements soon:

The Burlington & Mo. River Railroad Company will soon reach the Red Oak Junction. The line thence to Nebraska City, either by Sidney or Hamburg should be placed under contract during the next thirty days if it is to be completed in 1869.

²⁵ Diary, January 2, 1869.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, January 3-11, 1869.

²⁷ Minutes of Commissioners, Otoe County, January 11, 15, 1869; cited in Krebs, *op. cit.*, 89.

²⁸ Diary, January 4, 1869.

²⁹ Krebs, *op. cit.*, 90.

We hope soon to hear definitely what the people of Page, Montgomery and Fremont counties, in Iowa, have agreed to do to aid the building of this much needed thoroughfare.

It is of the most vital importance to Nebraska City that this direct connection with Chicago be secured and completed, *now*, this year!

It appeared for a time that a combination of factors would bring about the condition so ardently wished for by the *News*. The Midland Pacific, which for several months had been languishing, was revived by arrangements made with the Pennsylvania Central Railroad to complete its construction.³⁰ Morton and McCann telegraphed Strong and Perkins warning them that the Pennsylvania was on the ground.³¹ Evidently it was hoped that fear of further aid to the Midland Pacific, now that it was backed by an Eastern company, would galvanize the Burlington officials into action. On April 29, Morton addressed a mass meeting of citizens at Sidney urging that they subscribe \$50,000 to the project.³² The results of this meeting, while not conclusive, were so favorable that when Perkins learned of them, he telegraphed Morton that the B. & M. Railroad was secured to Nebraska City, and Morton could write in his diary, "and I have thus been a public benefactor."

A few days later Morton went to Sidney to witness the final arrangements for the grant of \$50,000 which that town was supposed to make to insure the building of the road.³³ On May 22, a mass meeting was held in Nebraska City, at which Morton read a letter from Strong saying that if the conditions of the proposed contract were complied with, the road would be built immediately and would be operated as a through line to Chicago and Eastern cities. The meeting overwhelmingly voted to sustain the commissioners in concluding a contract with the B. & M.³⁴ On May 29, under conditions of "high excitement," the contract was concluded, and "prospects [were] good for Rail Road and popular prosperity in Nebraska City." ³⁵

Morton was highly praised for his work in bringing the Burlington and Missouri to Nebraska City. Judge O. P. Mason shared in

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

³¹ Diary, April 26, 1869.

³² *Nebraska City News*, April 30, 1869.

³³ *Ibid.*, May 15, 1869.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, May 22, 1869.

³⁵ Diary, May 29, 1869.

the glory. D. J. McCann also deserves credit for his part in the negotiations. The month of June was not unlike that summer of 1855 when the people of Nebraska City spent their time "talking and meditating upon the prospective value of city property."³⁶ Property holders were beginning to experience the pleasant realization that the coming of the railroad actually would increase the value of their land. Morton was offered \$20,000 for his farm, which he had estimated but a few months before as worth only \$12,000. In order to share in the rising prices he bought more land himself—six lots in Nebraska City—and was considering about thirteen hundred acres across the river in Iowa.³⁷ He kept the *News* in the foreground by glorying in the city's "certain future." The following is illustrative:

People who want no railroads, no telegraphs, no daily newspapers, no noise and bustle of city life need not come to Nebraska City to abide. We shall have railroads hence East, West, South and North during the coming two years! Nothing can prevent this.

Nebraska City is today only just beginning to raise a row in the commercial world. Next year Nebraska City will be the champion city of the state and wear the belt of progress.³⁸

Unfortunately, new difficulties were encountered. The company, having difficulty in obtaining the desired right of way in Fremont County, Iowa, notified the Otoe County Commissioners through Henry Strong that unless it were allowed to select its own route through the county, it would be unable to build the road within the fifteen months stipulated in the Otoe County grant. The commissioners, apparently obsessed with the importance of time, took up the matter, and amended the previous proposition by striking out the stipulation as to the exact route.³⁹

Soon it appeared that they had made a mistake. The road was not to be built through Sidney, but the company, freed of route requirements, decided to build through Hamburg, thence to the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph Railroad, and run up their tracks to within one and one-fourth miles of the Nebraska City ferry, then build a short line to the river, circling to rejoin the Council Bluffs

³⁶ See p. 52.

³⁷ Diary, June 15-17, 1869.

³⁸ *Nebraska City News*, September 18, 1869.

³⁹ Krebs, *op. cit.*, 92.

and St. Joseph to the north of Nebraska City. Thus, the Burlington and Missouri fulfilled the letter of the contract, but by no means the spirit as understood by the residents of Otoe County.⁴⁰

The action on the part of the railroad, putting Nebraska City not on the main line but only on a spur, created an uproar in Otoe County. As Morton had been praised earlier, so now he was vilified. He took it all calmly enough, though his diary for the latter part of 1869 clearly shows that he was disappointed in the action of the B. & M. Mason wrote that they had been "fools," and had been left "holding an empty sack for Snypers on a rainy night." He cursed the "utter perfidy and faithlessness of any and all corporations and all connected with them," declaring: "They are created without souls the summation of man and in modern times are used only to rob and swindle the public."⁴¹

On June 8, 1870, Morton sold his interest in the *News* and "quit editorial life with great satisfaction."⁴²

He had utilized his editorial and personal position to the full in securing railroad connections for Nebraska City—improvements which he felt absolutely necessary to the future welfare of the community. True, he had not succeeded as he had once hoped; yet the railroad had been built, and Nebraska City had established connections with the East, and, through the Midland Pacific, with the West *via* Lincoln. Though Morton always maintained more interest in the B. & M., all through 1869 he had cheered the Midland on its way to the capital city. When articles from the *News* relative to the progress of the Midland were reprinted in other papers, Morton wrote proudly: "This illustrates the fact that the Nebraska City News is doing a good deal of gratuitous advertising for the public good."⁴³

The paper reflected closely its editor's interests, and Morton having dropped out of politics in 1868, the *News* under his leadership was from that time always concerned more with railroads than

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴¹ Mason to Morton, November 12, 1869.

⁴² Diary, June 8, 1869.

⁴³ *Nebraska City News*, July 31, 1869.

with politics. Yet he kept the paper strictly Democratic, and shortly before he left it affirmed: "The News stands today, where it has always stood in favor of a bold and full avowal of the principles for which the party contends. Free trade and the reduction of taxation upon labor with an equitable tax upon wealth and capital wherever found or in whatever shape. . . ."⁴⁴

Also, there were times when he could not resist using his pen against the party in power, and for the reader with political interests the *News* was enlivened with such paragraphs as the following:

A total disregard of the earnest recommendation of the Legislature of Nebraska, in the matter of making General John Milton Thayer a member of his Cabinet, has been evinced by the President of the United States.

Gen. Grant heeded not the loil [*sic*] voice of Nebraska, as expressed by the representatives of the Indian, Whiskey, and Land, and Lot Rings of advanced patriotism in our late law-making sanhedrin at Lincoln. General Grant has thus exhibited a pig-headed obstinacy which must be quite disgusting to the several barrels of brains which exercised themselves so fearfully in evolving and passing the resolution soliciting and demanding a Cabinet office for the distinguished citizen soldier Gen. Thayer. . . ."⁴⁵

But political subjects were at a disadvantage in the competition for space in the *News*. Railroads were too all-absorbing; and there were other prospective improvements which captured the interest of the editor.

On March 22, 1869, a Dock and Levy Company was organized, and the same day Morton agreed to organize a gas company. Five days later he had organized the "Nebraska City Hydraulic Gas Light and Coke Company."⁴⁶ The residents of Nebraska City were losing no time in giving their bustling little town all the accoutrements of a city.

A week before he left the *News*, Morton urged the necessity of a street railway:

The people of Nebraska City are awakening to the fixed fact that this is a metropolitan community. By the long and earnest efforts of the Daily News, they have been induced to lay several miles of substantial sidewalks and now, next in order, is a street railway.

This enterprise, in the hands of practical men, can be put into operation during the present year and made at once an accommodating, useful and paying

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1870.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, May 13, 1869.

⁴⁶ Diary, March 22-27, 1869.

institution. There are no good reasons against it and there are scores of good ones for it. . . .

Let us have the Nebraska City Horse Railway organized and in operation during 1870.⁴⁷

Though Morton was enthusiastic in his advocacy of railroads and other improvements, on the whole his conservatism kept his enthusiasm within bounds that must be looked upon as extremely reasonable for a young man in his thirties living under the pressure of all the excitement that surrounded the building of the Western railroads.

In 1866, he had felt that railroads within the State of Nebraska were still too far in the future to warrant the withdrawal of land for their use. The B. & M. had accepted title to a grant of land in Nebraska on January 16, 1865, and on June 15 had officially adopted a survey as far as Fort Kearny.⁴⁸ Pursuant to this, Secretary of the Interior Harlan, in January 1866, had withdrawn from private entry ten alternate sections on each side of the projected line.⁴⁹ When Harlan was succeeded by O. H. Browning, Morton urged the latter to cancel the withdrawal on the ground that it would injure the territory by excluding homesteaders from an unnecessarily large portion of the public domain. Browning, evidently convinced by this argument, on March 1, 1867, restored to public market all odd sections further than twenty miles from the route of the road.⁵⁰

Morton was firmly convinced that while railroads and other improvements were of vital importance and should be pursued with diligence, the people should not overlook the fact that the primary interest of Nebraska was, and was to be, agriculture. He expressed his conviction in a masterful editorial in the summer of 1867:

People pray for a rail road, but overlook the pioneer plow which naturally precedes the locomotive. Nebraska needs plows more than railroads; fifty thousand more plows at work to the West of us would produce enough to attract the rails and the engines and the cars. The products of the land would make a carrying trade for rail roads and until such products are raised in such abundance it is useless and idle to talk of interior rail roads in Nebraska except those which, like the Union Pacific, are going across the continent and are gifts of the

⁴⁷ *Nebraska City News*, June 2, 1870.

⁴⁸ Overton, *op. cit.*, 214.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 269-270.

people or Government of the United States. . . .

We want plows to the West of us, plows to the North of us, plows to the South of us, and plows all around us. They will prepare the way for Railroads and produce something for them to transport. . . .

Whatever of prosperity shall ever come to this people will be born of the SOIL. Whatever of the beautiful or the useful shall ever distinguish this State from other States the SOIL shall send up.

Plow and produce prosperity. . . .

Plow and make farms in Nebraska and let dreamers build uninhabited cities and airy railroads elsewhere, in some Utopia.⁵¹

When the railroad had arrived, one of its most significant aspects, in Morton's opinion, was the increased value of land; and in 1870, shortly before leaving the *News*, he urged all who ever proposed to be owners of real estate in Nebraska to buy immediately: "Now is the time; now is the accepted hour, in which to secure for yourself and family some of the green earth's broad acres to call thine own and upon which the sacred feelings of home ownership may spring up and flourish."⁵²

⁵¹ *Nebraska City News*, July 27, 1867.

⁵² *Ibid.*, January 27, 1870.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

KEEPING THE PEOPLE CONVINCED

RAILROADS CONTINUED TO BE an absorbing topic in Nebraska for more than a generation. In Nebraska City, after connections with the East and West had been secured through the Burlington and Missouri River and the Midland Pacific Railroads, a considerable portion of public interest turned toward securing an outlet north and south along the west bank of the Missouri River.

There had been agitation for a "trunk railroad" up the west bank of the Missouri since 1867.¹ Such a road would parallel the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph running along the eastern bank, but it appeared necessary because bridging the river in the Sixties and early Seventies was an undertaking almost as serious as building a new road. A company had been formed to construct the "trunk" line, but it had spent several years in a rather fruitless effort to obtain aid from the various river counties—the east-west connections were too all-important. About 1872, however, it appeared that the desired assistance would be forthcoming. That it did not was largely due to Morton's influence in Otoe County.

The Eastern connection, *via* the B. & M., had always been Morton's main railroad interest. As soon as the line had been built to Eastport, the ferry landing across the Missouri, Morton began an agitation to have it improved by the construction of a bridge to span

¹ Krebs, "Local Aid to Railroads in Southeastern Nebraska" (Ms. in University of Nebraska Library), 130.

the river. To this end, a bridge company was formed in December 1871.² It did not, however, secure much cooperation from the officials of the railroad.

"Is not the whole bridge movement at Neb. City premature?" asked Charles E. Perkins. "Who wants a bridge there at present? It would not pay operating expenses."³

Nevertheless, the men who wanted the bridge were undaunted. They invited General W. W. Wright, of Leavenworth, Kansas, to visit the city and make estimates of the cost of construction.⁴ They sought to secure public aid for their project by opposing the movement to bond the county in the interest of the "trunk railroad" (the north and south line). It was necessary to do this. According to the law of February 16, 1869, under which county bonds were issued for internal improvements, the county's total indebtedness could not exceed ten per cent of the assessed value of its taxable property.⁵ Another sizable bond issue would be about all Otoe County would be allowed.⁶

Morton successfully opposed the issuance of bonds to the "trunk" line. In a public meeting called to consider the question, he urged that before any bonds were voted there should be definite assurance of a connection with St. Louis, the proposed southern terminal. He declared that it would be useless to give bonds merely to secure a road through a few counties in eastern Nebraska. His proposition carried the meeting,⁷ but aid from St. Louis was not forthcoming, and the proposal was temporarily shelved.⁸

About all the Nebraska City Bridge Company was able to accomplish, however, was to get an act through Congress in 1872

² W. W. Baldwin, *Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company, Documentary History*, III:185.

³ Charles E. Perkins to Morton, January 29, 1872.

⁴ Cf. notation in Morton's hand, W. W. Wright to Morton, August 3, 1872.

⁵ C. E. Tingley, "Bond Subsidies to Railroads in Nebraska," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, VI (April 1892), 376-377.

⁶ Krebs, *op. cit.*, 161.

⁷ *Nebraska City News*, February 10, 1872.

⁸ Krebs, *op. cit.*, 153. Following this setback the original Nebraska Trunk Rail Road Company was dissolved, and a new corporation formed. Morton wrote to James F. Joy saying that the Union Pacific was believed to be behind the new company, and that, though they were considering construction of the road, he believed the Burlington, if it desired, could secure the right to build it. Morton to J. F. Joy, June 12, 1872.

authorizing the construction of a bridge across the Missouri River, with approaches. The bridge was not constructed until 1888.⁹ The agitation, however, forestalling aid to the trunk road for the sake of guaranteeing aid to the B. & M., if and when a bridge should be built, provided strong evidence that Morton's sympathies definitely were with the Burlington in all railroad matters.

Concurrent activity which further established Morton's connection with the Burlington interest was his attempt to effect a consolidation between the Burlington and Missouri River and the Midland Pacific Railroads.

He had long felt that such a consolidation was necessary to the advancement of Nebraska City. At the time the Eastern connection was being established he had wanted the Midland Pacific to sell out to the B. & M.¹⁰

During 1872, when the B. & M. attempted to purchase the interests of the Midland Pacific, Morton was active in promoting the consolidation. Such action would, in his opinion, make Nebraska City "*the city of Nebraska.*"¹¹

The negotiations did not proceed with alacrity. The difficulty, according to the officials of the B. & M., was with the Midland, and particularly Dr. J. N. Converse, the general manager. In answering a query from Morton as to why the arrangement had not been consummated, Henry Strong wrote: ". . . The failure to connect on purchase of Midland was with them, as we offered them in guaranteed bonds of the road, the amount agreed upon. This was two or three weeks since & we have heard nothing from Dr. Converse subsequent. The bonds of course are just as good as cash to them as our Nebraska bonds sell for par easily & Iowa bonds much more . . . I suppose they (MP) people changed their mind about selling. . . . I can buy the Des Moines valley road running from Des Moines to Keokuk for *less money than we offered M. P. . . .*"¹²

Later he wondered whether Converse really wanted to sell, or was,

⁹ Baldwin, *op. cit.*, III:185.

¹⁰ See p. 172.

¹¹ Diary, October 29, 1872.

¹² Henry Strong to Morton, February 3, 1872.

"simply feeling . . . with view to other arrangements in all his talk about selling. . . ." ¹³

On March 15, Morton left Nebraska City for Detroit with Paul, his second son, where the latter was to enter his Uncle Ira Mayhew's Commercial College. He stopped enroute at Burlington, Iowa, to discuss "railroad business" with Perkins and Strong, and was advised to go to Columbus, Ohio, to see Judge Hugh J. Jewett, President of the Little Miami Railroad Company, an organization which held a large block of Midland stock, about the possibilities of a purchase by the B. & M. The next day, after a long trip on a slow train, father and son arrived in Chicago, where they took rooms at the Tremont House, on the southern edge of the area devastated by the great fire. While in Chicago, Morton conferred with J. M. Walker, President of the C. B. & Q. After leaving Paul at Detroit, he went on to Columbus where he saw Judge Jewett and Governor Dennison, "on RR business," finding them in spite of his headache "very pleasant and agreeable people." On his way home, he reported to Walker in Chicago, and to Perkins and Strong in Burlington.¹⁴

There is no direct record of these conversations, but some time after he had returned home, Morton wrote Jewett that Perkins, upon hearing of their conversation, "reiterated the statement that his people in Boston would purchase the Midland if you desired to sell the same and would give you Nine Hundred & Fifty Thousand Dollars for the same and that, if I desire to, I might so say to you. Should you still wish to sell I think the transaction can, through me, probably be brought to a conclusion mutually satisfactory to all interested parties. . . ." ¹⁵

Jewett replied that he thought \$950,000 would be satisfactory, but before anything definite could be done he would have to speak to "Mr. Smith, who has had more immediate charge of this enterprise, [and] is now in New York City." ¹⁶ Arrangements were made for Smith to meet J. W. Brooks, President of the B. & M., in Boston,¹⁷

¹³ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1872.

¹⁴ Diary, March 15–April 4, 1872.

¹⁵ Morton to Hugh J. Jewett, May 16, 1872.

¹⁶ Jewett to Morton, May 20, 1872.

¹⁷ Perkins to Morton, June 12, 1872.

but at this meeting the Midland had so raised its price that the B. & M. felt that a trade would be impossible.¹⁸

Having failed again to effect a consolidation because the Midland insisted upon raising its price, Morton, who held it "vital to Nebraska City and her people,"¹⁹ consulted with James M. Woolworth in Omaha as to the possibilities of using the Midland's shaky financial position as a means of forcing a sale. Woolworth thought that if an aggrieved stockholder could be persuaded to apply for a receivership it might incline the Midland to sell, and if they still persisted in keeping their price too high, the court could order a sale.²⁰ Morton and Woolworth appeared quite sanguine over the success of the scheme, but the B. & M. was unenthusiastic. Henry Strong, B. & M. attorney, felt that the aggrieved stockholders should proceed at their own expense if anything was done at all,²¹ and later confessed that he had no confidence in the legal status of the case.²² After much scheming, court action was brought, but nothing definite was decided. Woolworth was disappointed, and wished they "had never thought of it."²³

In the end, Morton was unsuccessful in his efforts to effect a combination of the two railroads serving Nebraska City.²⁴ Yet he had established himself with Burlington officials. They had come to appreciate his abilities, and soon placed new and much more important work in his hands.

On November 19, 1872, while in Lincoln on a business trip, Morton was approached by George S. Harris, land commissioner of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska, in regard to enlisting his services as lecturer and writer to promote the sales of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, June 26, 1872.

¹⁹ Morton to Jewett, May 27, 1872.

²⁰ Woolworth to Morton, August 20, 1872.

²¹ Strong to Morton, September 20, 1872.

²² *Ibid.*, October 21, 1872.

²³ Woolworth to Morton, July 3, 1873.

²⁴ On August 1, 1876, the Midland Pacific which had been incorporated into the Nebraska Railway Company was leased to the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska for five years. On June 5, 1877, a supplemental lease was signed making the agreement for 999 years. On September 1, 1888, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, having bought the B. & M. in Nebraska, assumed the lease. In 1908, the Nebraska Railway Company was deeded to the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. Baldwin, *op. cit.*, III:232-237.

their lands in Iowa and Nebraska.²⁵ Morton was agreeable, and arrangements were made for him to make a tour of the Eastern states in the interest of Nebraska and the B. & M.²⁶

Such a task was well suited to Morton's interests and abilities. His residence in Nebraska since 1854 qualified him to speak from experience. The prominent part he had taken in political and agricultural affairs lent weight to his opinions. His talent for both the spoken and the written word was conceded by all. He could bring to his work a genuine belief that the sale of lands to prospective settlers was of vital importance not only to the railroad but to the state.

At Christmas time he left Nebraska City with Mrs. Morton, Paul, and Carl. Paul stopped over in Burlington, where he was to go to work for the railroad.²⁷ The others went on to Monroe and Detroit, Michigan, to spend the holidays at their old homes, enjoying once again, "places where, as a boy, thirty years ago . . . [he] passed many jolly days unwearied with thought or care." He did not spend all his time reliving the past, however, for each day he was busy "talking up" Nebraska lands. He also wrote a couple of editorials for the *Monroe Monitor* which he judged were "not modest as to Nebraska and her soil & climate."²⁸

Leaving Mrs. Morton in Detroit, he went on to New York, where he was expected to do most of his work. He was in New York for almost three months. He attended the regular meetings of the Farmers Club in Cooper Institute, and made "quite an impression in favor of Nebraska soil & climate" on that body.²⁹ He wrote long articles in praise of Nebraska for the *New York Weekly Times* which had a large rural circulation. With Henry C. Colton of that paper he attended a meeting of the New York Agricultural Society at Albany. One day he spent "labor[ing] faithfully with [a] German editor on Nebraska lands."³⁰ Almost every day he saw prospective buyers in the interest of Nebraska and the B. & M.

²⁵ Diary, November 19, 1872; Harris to Morton, November 21, 1872.

²⁶ Diary, December 13, 1872.

²⁷ Morton to Joy Morton, December 21, 1872.

²⁸ Diary, January 1-9, 1873.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1873.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, January 25, 1873.

The officials of the road were enthusiastic in praise of his work. Harris wrote: "That stock raising article in N. Y. Weekly Times . . . is tip top—Bully for you. N. Y. is your place as long as you can keep up such fire. . . ." ³¹ C. E. Perkins read "with much pleasure" his work in the *Times*, and thought it would "hit some of the 'barbarians' sure." ³²

Morton, however, found the work oppressive and uncongenial. A few days after he had arrived he noted that New York was "not so good as home for fresh air and fair skies." ³³ He was sure that he could not be persuaded to live there permanently for less than \$1,000 a month, and was sorry that he had undertaken the mission "at this dog-killing price." ³⁴

It appeared, though, that his trip had been successful, and satisfactory to his employers. There was some thought of having him replace Professor J. D. Butler as permanent publicity agent for the Land Department.³⁵ Butler, who had made a reputation as a world traveller, lecturer, and entertainer, had been hired by Harris in 1869 to advertise the B. & M. lands in Iowa and Nebraska at a salary of \$2,500. The professor had been advised by the canny Scotchman who employed him to use "good old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon words" in his articles and lectures,³⁶ but his propensity for flowery language had led him to disregard the advice. His articles describing Omaha and Nebraska City in terms more suited to Athens and Rome often provoked disgust from the Nebraska press, and the *Ashland Times* styled him "a literary deadbeat." ³⁷

Butler remained, however, and Harris feared that the Land Department's appropriation was too meagre to give a second man permanent employment.³⁸ Nevertheless, he wanted Morton to attend the National Agricultural Congress in Indianapolis on behalf of the state and the railroad.³⁹ Governor Furnas also urged him to

³¹ Harris to Morton, March 10, 1873.

³² Perkins to Morton, March 1, 1873.

³³ Diary, January 13, 1873.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1873.

³⁵ Cf. Perkins to Morton, April 21, 1873; W. D. Cowles, General Eastern Agent, to Morton, April 26, 1873; Harris to Morton, May 6, 1873.

³⁶ Overton, *op. cit.*, 299.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

³⁸ Harris to Morton, May 3, 1873.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1873.

attend the convention.⁴⁰ Morton had little enthusiasm for the trip. The orchard was in bloom; a number of apple trees needed transplanting from the old orchard to the new one. The farm was too attractive in the month of May for its owner to be easily persuaded to leave it. He put his price so high that the railroad was unwilling to pay it.⁴¹

Though the Land Department was unable to afford him, developments in the Northwest soon impressed upon the officials of the Burlington the value of a man of Morton's position, abilities, and opinions.

The enthusiasm for railroads in the West, growing out of a real need for transportation, developed into a mania for railroad construction. The immediate building of railroads was thought paramount to all other interests. Towns, counties, states, and the federal government aided lavishly with land grants, loans, and donations, and among them often furnished a large part of the cost of construction. In addition, the railroads were able to appeal successfully to private individuals along the routes to invest heavily in stock, frequently at the expense of mortgages on their farms.⁴² The demand for transportation soon outran the supply of conservative capital, yet so great was the desire for railroads that fly-by-night speculators often were aided as generously as were the conservative builders. An individual or a community victimized by one of these speculators was in the mood to believe corporate capital guilty of any malpractice.

Then, there were features of the management of the railroads that tended to arouse antagonism. There was complaint regarding inconvenience to which employees put passengers and shippers. It was felt by Westerners that such abuses were due to the fact that the railroads were owned and controlled by men who lived in the East or in Europe. There was complaint about the influence railroads were supposed to exercise over public officials, largely through the free pass system which gave virtually all public officials free trans-

⁴⁰ Furnas to Morton, May 9, 1873.

⁴¹ Diary, May 15, 1873.

⁴² Solon J. Buck, *The Granger Movement* (Cambridge, 1913), 9-10.

portation for themselves and families. Probably the greatest grievance, however, grew out of rates. The farmers claimed that the rates were too high, and that discrimination was practiced in fixing them.⁴³

Giving voice to agricultural grievances, and possibly aggravating them, was the rapidly developing Granger Movement. Organized in 1869 for the social and economic betterment of the farmers, the Grange always disavowed any political ambition, yet farmers were generally inclined to ascribe political causes to their economic grievances,⁴⁴ and because of this, the Grange became a political power to the extent that it developed among the farmers a co-operative spirit and furnished a means for working together.

The local granges increased rapidly. By May 1873, there were 3,360 in the United States; by March 1874, their number had increased to 14,365; and by September of the same year, to 20,365.⁴⁵ The movement achieved its greatest success in the Northwest, and particularly in Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska, the states through which the Burlington had the bulk of its track. The Nebraska State Grange was organized August 2, 1872,⁴⁶ and by September 1, 1874, 596 local granges had been organized, or 1,190 for every 100,000 of the agricultural population of the state.⁴⁷

Anti-railroad agitation resulted in regulatory measures in Illinois in 1871 and 1873, and in Iowa in 1874. There was no regulation in Nebraska until 1881, and this fact has been construed to mean that there was little anti-railroad sentiment in the state in the early Seventies.⁴⁸ This is in error. Not only did the granges of Nebraska reflect the railroad animus of the older states in their public pronouncements, but they agitated against certain of the activities of roads within the state. The Grangers, from the time of their organization, attempted to secure railway regulation;⁴⁹ and even before the organization of the Patrons of Husbandry in the state there had

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 58 ff.

⁴⁶ Juliette Herscher, "Early Third Party Movements in Nebraska" (Ms. in University of Nebraska Library), 31.

⁴⁷ Buck, *op. cit.*, 58 ff.

⁴⁸ Cf. Frank Haigh Dixon, "Railroad Control in Nebraska," *Political Science Quarterly*, XIII:620-622.

⁴⁹ Herscher, *op. cit.*, 35-37.

been vigorous attempts to halt what was thought to be the oppression of monopolies. The proposed constitution of 1871, which was not adopted, contained a clause giving the legislature the authority to establish rates, and to "correct abuses and prevent unjust use and extortions in the rates of freight and passenger tariffs." This clause provoked much discussion, but the constitution was defeated not because of it, but largely because someone found a provision taxing church lands.⁵⁰

By midsummer 1873, the officials of the Burlington were awake to their position. To Charles E. Perkins the prospect for the immediate future was not at all encouraging:

While the "Farmers" are howling so against Railroads the Railroads are more or less of them failing on their interest, & between the two the outside public will not buy bonds (let alone stocks) at any price. The "average" investor of the East is gradually coming to the conclusion that he does not care to invest his money from one to two thousand miles away from home, in enterprises which at the best are always doubtful in the beginning, unless he can be permitted to have some voice in its management. To the "average" legislating farmer mind this may seem unreasonable, not to say grasping & sordid—but nevertheless it is true, and the consequence is probably going to be that not only bad roads which would not pay, but good ones which would, must go unbuilt. . . .⁵¹

On July 9, President Walker of the C. B. & Q., wrote Morton: "I want some one to devote six or eight months to the writing and preparing of articles on the railroad question. Are you so situated that you could give your time to the matter. . . ." ⁵²

Within a week after receiving Walker's letter, Morton saw Perkins in Lincoln, and on July 24, he met Walker in Chicago and made definite arrangements to work for the Burlington during the remainder of the year.⁵³

Immediately Morton got busy. He had long talks with Walker, Goddard and other Burlington officials in Chicago. He visited the newspaper offices of that city. While at the *Journal* office, he saw copy for the handbills advertising him as the speaker for the Nebraska State Fair to be held in September, and, according to his diary, "fixed" the bill by striking the prefix "Hon." from his name.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Perkins to Morton, June 26, 1873.

⁵² Walker to Morton, July 9, 1873.

⁵³ Diary, July 24, 1873.

His diary shows an almost daily completion of articles on the railroad question. Not only were they placed in the Chicago papers, but in those of Omaha, St. Louis, and other Western cities. The directors in Boston arranged for reprinting these articles in Eastern papers.⁵⁴

J. M. Forbes, Chairman of the Board, was enthusiastic about Morton's work. He wrote to President Walker, after seeing one of his productions: "It confirms the idea that I had before that Morton has 'faculty' for this sort of writing. . . . A condensation of such articles as his ought to be got into every religious or agricultural paper which circulates in the West."⁵⁵

Morton supplemented his writing with speaking. The most important of his oratorical efforts during 1873 was the address at the State Fair, September 2. He was introduced by Governor Furnas who said that Morton had been chosen because the State Board of Agriculture believed that the time had arrived when they should have "plain, practical talks" with themselves, "as to matters in which all, who are co-laborers in the work of developing a nature-favored region, are interested."⁵⁶

The day was hot, dry, and dusty. Morton had a fearful headache, and was nearly sick. After delivering his address, he noted, "Audience, self and patience severely tried by same."⁵⁷

He declaimed at length regarding the effect of railroads upon the value of land, painting a vivid contrast between 1855 and 1873. He declared the 1,500 miles of railroads in the state to be "among the principal causes of value to our lands. They have made them inhabitable. They have made them accessible. They are the iron tonic which has given a new life and vigor to our commerce and industries. Without these and similar efforts our prairies would be as valueless today as they were eighteen years ago."

He urged upon his hearers the importance of leaving the railroad service to be governed by the law of supply and demand, and pointed to the regulatory laws in Illinois as omens of bankruptcy within that state.

⁵⁴ L. O. Goddard to Morton, August 18, 1873.

⁵⁵ J. M. Forbes to James M. Walker, September 18, 1873.

⁵⁶ J. Sterling Morton, *A Speech, Delivered at the Nebraska State Fair. . . .* State Board of Agriculture, 1873, 3.

⁵⁷ Diary, September 2, 1873.

Morton was no mere pleader for the railroads or corporate capital, however. Consistent with his position that government should abstain from all interference in industry, he inveighed against protective tariffs as the "worst possible form of taxes," and urged their abolition as unjust discrimination in favor of one industry at the expense of all the others. He further declared that the habit of donating county bonds to railroads was a "vicious and inequitable custom . . . which cannot be too soon abandoned in Nebraska, and everywhere else." He advocated a constitutional preventive to the issuance of county bonds to corporations, "before the realty of the entire commonwealth, and the labor of a generation to come, have been mortgaged to the railroads."

The burden of his address was a plea for a better understanding of the interdependent relationship between the farmers and the railroads:

The railroads without your farms well-tilled and brought to a high state of production would be worthless indeed, and your farms, however bountiful the return of product for your labor, would be valueless without the track, the engine and the car, which connect you with the markets of the world.⁵⁸

There were other speeches. He addressed a farmers' convention in Chicago on the inadvisability of further governmental aid to railroads, but a resolution of the opposing sentiment was passed by the body, greatly to Morton's disgust, who was fearful that it was "a convocation of prejudice."⁵⁹ A convention of grangers in Council Bluffs seemed more receptive. Morton addressed them on hogs and the "Reduction of Bulks," and they "seemed highly pleased."⁶⁰

Morton's advice to the grangers to convert their corn into pork was followed assiduously by himself, and with pleasing results. The day before Christmas he finished hauling his own hogs to market, and noted: "They aggregate between 19 & 20000 pounds and will bring me between \$1000 and \$1100. The corn they consumed would not sell for \$500. They are condensers of bulk and enhancers of value."⁶¹

Morton's main activity, however, was the preparation of news-

⁵⁸ Morton, *A Speech Delivered at the Nebraska State Fair*. . . . *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁹ Diary, October 22, 1873.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, December 4, 1873.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, December 24, 1873.

paper articles on the railroad question, and so quickly was his reputation as a railroad publicist established that near the end of the year he was approached by O. F. Davis, land commissioner of the Union Pacific, regarding the possibility of that road's securing his services as editor for *The Pioneer*, a promotional magazine which the Land Department proposed to publish.⁶² Inasmuch as his contract with the Burlington would expire December 31, Morton was interested in the new proposition, and did prepare material for a sample copy.⁶³ The Burlington, however, was not prepared to let Morton go.

"My own feeling," Perkins wrote, "is that you are needed where you are now as an educator of public sentiment & that the CB&Q and others cant afford to let you go. . . . This cruel war is not over yet." ⁶⁴

J. M. Forbes declared that just because there was a momentary lull "on the Granger Humbug," they should "by no means consider the war over." He hoped that Morton and President Walker were making arrangements "to carry on the process of education for at least a year longer." ⁶⁵

President Walker, who earlier was not sure that he wanted to keep Morton in the pay of the company,⁶⁶ decided in January, possibly under pressure from Boston, that resistance against the Grangers should be continued, and asked Morton to come to Chicago, prepared to stay all winter, if necessary, and to devote his entire time and abilities to the work.⁶⁷

Of the railroad officials who advised Morton on his journalistic work in their behalf, none was more frequent nor sure of himself than Charles E. Perkins, dynamic vice president and general manager of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad. The particular ideas contained in his hasty letters—often dashed off on a scratch pad while the writer was enroute from one B. & M. town to another—

⁶² O. F. Davis to Morton, October 20, 1873.

⁶³ Diary, December 1, 1873.

⁶⁴ Perkins to Morton, November 20, 1873.

⁶⁵ Forbes to Morton, December 9, 1873.

⁶⁶ Perkins to Morton, November 20, 1873.

⁶⁷ Goddard to Morton, January 16, 1874.

seem to have been composed on the spur of the moment, yet they express with sureness and clarity a general philosophy of business which unmistakably believed in the community of private interest and public good.

"How would it do to write an editorial . . . on Middlemen," he suggested at one time, "to show that a middleman who writes for a living in keeping books, or who travels in buying & selling grain, is as much a *producer* as men who plough corn. Men produce nothing really—the earth does it—but the farmers and middlemen both add value—the farmer no more however by putting seeds in the ground & keeping weeds out than the middleman who carries it or helps carry it to market." ⁶⁸

Upon another occasion he expressed himself regarding the obligations accompanying the railroad land grants:

The chief reason given by the members of society calling themselves producers, why railroad tariffs shd be regulated by law, is that the state in giving RRds the right of eminent domain, gave a *consideration* to the RRds. This is absurd, of course, because what the State gave the right of eminent domain for was the *building of the Road* and that was the full consideration without any right to operate it after it was built. Now to bring this home to the hardy sons of toil who have taken *Homesteads* for nothing from the Government you can show them that the same process of reasoning which wld regulate RRd tariffs would also regulate the price of Homestead wheat—why not? Hepburn is responsible for this suggestion & I think there is something in it as an argument to use in all states where a good many voters have taken homesteads—especially in our own state of Nebraska.⁶⁹

The railroads sought to combat the legislative acts lowering intra-state rates by the argument that because they were unremunerative, it was necessary to raise rates on through shipments to make up the difference. When the Burlington's increase in grain rates to Chicago brought a storm of protest from farmers in Nebraska, Perkins wrote:

. . . I want to have it known that the raise is east of the Missouri & that it is the Iowa Tariff law that does it. Let it be clearly stated that the raise applies also to Iowa points for all frt to or from Illinois—& that if Nebr. puts on a tariff this coming winter as to our local rates it will simply put up all through rates—that is rates between all points in the state & all points out of it. The utter

⁶⁸ Perkins to Morton, June 3, 1874.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, July 17, 1874.

absurdity of the Iowa law ought to be apparent to your Nebraska Grangers if to no one else. . . .⁷⁰

The oft-repeated charge that the Burlington interfered in Nebraska's politics always annoyed Perkins. When Morton warned him that it was being rumored about the State that all the B. & M. officials in Nebraska were working for the election of General John M. Thayer to the Senate, and that he (Morton) was writing, "merely to place you on guard against entangling alliances,"⁷¹ Perkins irritably replied:

I have yours of the 5th instant relating to General Thayer and B&M, and I thank you for it. . . .

I understand that the Hon. W. H. B. Stout of Lincoln says the B&M is "run" by Mr. J. Sterling Morton of Nebr. City. I am also informed that we are managed by Ex. Gov. Paddock, and I expect soon to hear that we are as clay in the hands of Mr. Weston and Judge Dundy! With such wide differences of opinion among the great men it would be really interesting to know, who, in truth, does "run" us. Under the circumstances it may perhaps appear presumptuous in me to say that the B&M takes no interest in candidates.

One of my subordinates acting under the impression that the B&M was created solely for pecuniary profit, did furnish Genl Thayer with a special train from Lincoln to Omaha for which the Genl was charged \$100, and we shall esteem it a privilege to carry all of the senatorial and other candidates in Nebraska without regard to party at the same price—if we can provide the necessary rolling stock.⁷²

For his part, Morton found that Perkins' views were largely his own, and he had no difficulty in expressing himself with forcible conviction on all questions relating to the relationship between the railroads—or for that matter, all corporate capital—and the public. Often his contributions appeared unsigned in the editorial columns of the newspaper to which they were sent, thus apparently expressing the opinion of the editor. This practice doubtless worked to the advantage of both the paper and the railroad. Anonymity aided the railroads, because, as Forbes once wrote to Morton, "As a rule R Roads are always unpopular & the argument from their point of view is the least effective on the popular mind. . . ." ⁷³ It was of benefit to the newspapers, because few of them were able to employ

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, August 3, 1874.

⁷¹ Morton to Perkins, November 5, 1874.

⁷² Perkins to Morton, November 10, 1874.

⁷³ Forbes to Morton, December 9, 1873.

editorial writers with as great a facility as Morton for vigorous and entertaining expression of opinion.

The *Chicago Times* appears to have been the recipient of the largest number of Morton's articles. He probably found it easier to agree with its editorial policy than with that of many other newspapers. The *Times* was an old-school Democratic journal, so Morton could enliven his copy with political comparisons. In pointing out that the railroads could not make money under certain of the state regulatory laws, he declared that they paid dividends, "just about as regularly as Ben Butler prays or Zack Chandler founders himself drinking ice-water."⁷⁴ Storey was not opposed to Morton's lack of restraint in expression. It was in line with the oft-repeated admonition to his staff: "The function of a newspaper is to print the news, and raise hell."⁷⁵

Occasionally Morton's articles confined themselves to some specific aspect of the railroad question, but usually they developed into a general statement of the function of government. He did not confine himself to railroads for examples or inspiration. He opposed any attempts to fix prices by statute and found a farmer's convention advocating a fixed price of five dollars a hundredweight for hogs just as satisfactory a springboard for an article on price-fixing as laws establishing maximum freight rates. Commenting on the convention which would fix the price of hogs, he wrote:

... The pastoral producers of pork who then and there with oleaginous solemnity, perpetuated profitable pig culture, by the passage of a price proclaiming resolution, must gaze upon the stubbornly-fluctuating sides, hams, lard, sausage, shoulders, and spare-ribs with a degree of amazement akin to that which Mr. Xerxes experienced at the futility of his experiment in chaining the Hellespont. The price of pork seems remarkably regardless of resolutions, and sometimes roots under their figures, and quite often—declaring a hog-higher law, involving supply and demand,—jumps one or two cents above them, touching seven cents a pound quite easily at times. . . .⁷⁶

Morton's faith in the efficacy of the post Civil War legislatures as agencies for the alleviation of the country's economic and social

⁷⁴ *Chicago Times*, n.a., [1874?] (Morton Scrapbooks).

⁷⁵ See p. 29. Storey's fondness for Morton had not abated from the time of the collegiate expulsion.

⁷⁶ *Chicago Times*, November 28, 1874.

woes was strictly limited. He compared the "statute-spawning propensities of crude and ignorant legislators" to the "fecundity of the fish, the procreative power of the rat, and the reproductive capacity of the rabbit."

"Statute-spawning," he declared to be an evil to society, "equal to the grasshopper, weevil, chinch-bug, and dry weather," and held that "the manufacture of laws to dwarf one industry and exalt another, to conciliate one class and irritate another, is, primarily, the cause of nine-tenths of all the woes, either fancied or real, of the western states."⁷⁷

The one article that Morton thought contained, "the whole matter in a nutshell," was an editorial entitled "Legislative Communism."⁷⁸ The railroads, if this was a summation of their case, were by no means going to be satisfied with a compromise. They were holding out for nothing less than complete freedom from legislative control:

The law-making body which manufactures useless offices, and takes the people's money to pay the incumbents thereof, is no less communistic than the street commune of Paris. The latter is rather more frank and truthful in the method of robbery than the former. . . . The American legislator is a communist in disguise, sometimes; and under the color of the law, and protected by the provisions of the statutes, this sugar-coated pill of communism purges the public purse. . . . This piratical system of legislating has already alarmed European capital. It has already, in many western states, walled out the dollars which would have sought investment in their lands. And where it has been developed, it has been like a deadly upas tree to all property, all solvency, all commercial reputation. In Wisconsin, where communism, of the legislative sort, is the most pronounced and athletic—where they have asserted that the state can and does divorce from ownership the right to control the property owned—where the *vox populi* vociferates to capital: "You may construct, you may pay for railroads, and own railroads, but we will manage them, and put a limit to their earnings"—the result is most disastrous. No capital seeking investment looks over into Wisconsin; no newly-projected railways ramify Wisconsin; and Wisconsin is the first victim of legislative communism in America. And legislatures, having exercised their purloining ability upon railways and other taxable property with such potency, have alarmed capital everywhere to that extent that none willingly seeks investment in the western states. . . .⁷⁹

⁷⁷ [*Chicago Times*], n.d., [1874?] (Morton Scrapbooks).

⁷⁸ Morton to Goddard, November 23, 1874.

⁷⁹ *Chicago Times*, November 27, 1874.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WORKS AS WELL AS WORDS

RAILROAD OFFICIALS DID NOT confine their efforts to obtain good will to demonstrating that regulatory legislation was injurious to the transportation interests and harmful to the general public as well. They continued the work begun by the Land Departments to secure good will, and at the same time aid themselves, by advertising and improving the commonwealths which they served.

In Nebraska, the Burlington worked in close cooperation with the State Boards of Agriculture and Horticulture. Morton, as a successful farmer, a member of both boards, and an employee of the railroad, was peculiarly adapted to serve as a connecting link between the railroads and the agricultural interests of the state.

Having been awarded the first premium for apples and pears by the American Pomological Society in 1871, the State Boards were anxious to attempt a repetition in 1873. At the January meetings Morton, Governor Furnas, J. H. Masters, and J. T. Allen were appointed to arrange for the collection and exhibition of products of Nebraska at the pomological meeting to be held in Boston in September.¹

The State Board of Agriculture's expenses were heavy in comparison with its resources, and there was considerable doubt whether the treasury could provide adequate funds for the trip. If they could

¹ *Journal of Proceedings of the State Board of Agriculture of the State of Nebraska, September 4, 1873—January 26, 1876, 9.*

not make the trip "in such style as we desire and with the stock we wish to take," Governor Furnas proposed to give up the entire expedition for he did not propose to go "in any one-horse style, nor to pay expenses."²

The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad came to the Board's rescue in handsome fashion. Not only did it provide free transportation for the exhibit and the delegates, but constructed a special car at its Plattsmouth shops in which to do it.³ The railroad officials, having done this, wanted the excursion publicized to the fullest. Charles E. Perkins wrote to Morton: "We ought to arrange to have the car of fruit telegraphed to the Associated Press when it leaves Lincoln, also when it goes through Burlington & also in Chicago when it goes through there. . . . It is very important that everybody in the United States should become familiar with that car of fruit, & there is nothing like reading some dispatch about it every other day for two weeks. . . ."⁴

It also was arranged to have the car sent on to New York, after it had done duty at Boston, to be exhibited at the fair of the American Institute.⁵

The car, containing two hundred and thirty-seven varieties of apples, forty-nine of pears, twenty-five of peaches, fourteen of grapes, three of native plums, and twelve of evergreens,⁶ left Lincoln on September 5, just after the close of the State Fair. Accompanying it were Governor Furnas, Morton, and his son, Joy.⁷

The State Board of Agriculture had held a meeting at Lincoln on the fourth, and upon the resignation of Governor Furnas, president of the board since its organization, Morton, who had been first vice president, was elected to the presidency.⁸

Morton, whose sick headache had seriously hampered his oratorical effort at the fair,⁹ still was feeling out of health, and he found the trip anything but enjoyable.¹⁰ The success in Boston, however,

² Furnas to Morton, May 7, 1873.

³ *Journal . . . of the State Board of Agriculture . . .*, 11.

⁴ Perkins to Morton, August 28, 1873.

⁵ T. H. Leavitt to Morton, August 23, 1873.

⁶ *Journal of the State Board of Agriculture . . .*, 9.

⁷ Diary, September 5, 1873.

⁸ *Journal . . . of the State Board of Agriculture . . .*, 5.

⁹ See p. 190.

¹⁰ Diary, September 6-8, 1873.

made him feel better. Mr. John W. Brooks of the B. & M. was much pleased with the Nebraska fruit.¹¹ The Pomological Society awarded Nebraska a first premium for showing the best collection of apples, gave a medal for its collection of pears, and made honorable mention of its peaches, plums, and grapes.¹²

Furnas and Morton, still accompanied by Joy, went on to New York with the car of fruit and attended the fair of the American Institute. On the whole, the committee thought the trip a success, and in its report congratulated Nebraska upon the "second complete triumphant national success pomologically," and declared: "There is now no longer any doubt as to the adaptability of Nebraska as a fruit growing region."¹³ Superintendent George S. Harris, writing on behalf of the railroad, congratulated Morton upon their success "in Boston & all down East," with the Nebraska fruit.¹⁴

Soon after the Boston success, the Burlington decided to take further advantage of the good crops of 1873 by sending a collection of Nebraska products to England to be exhibited at the great Smithfield Fair in December by Hamilton A. Hill, their London representative. The railroad proposed that the State Board of Agriculture gather the products, and that the company transport them to London.¹⁵

Morton advertised in the papers for products to be sent to England, but they were slow in coming in, and it was necessary for T. H. Leavitt, assistant land commissioner of the B. & M., to make up a collection as best he could and start it on its way.¹⁶ Even so, the exhibit was successful in exciting English interest in Western emigration, and Hamilton A. Hill wrote Morton that he intended to make the exhibition of Western produce a permanent practice, and felt that he should have the cooperation of the State Board of Agriculture. He recognized that his primary purpose—that of advertising the B. & M. lands—was a private one, but felt the state would benefit as greatly as the railroad by the increased immigration that he

¹¹ *Ibid.*, September 10, 1873.

¹² *Journal . . . of the State Board of Agriculture . . .*, 10–11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴ George S. Harris to Morton, September 19, 1873.

¹⁵ Leavitt to Morton, October 6, 1873.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, November 4, 1873.

was sure would result. He urged that every care be taken to send the best possible samples, because it was the English custom to exhibit nothing but the very finest of everything, and to tell the people that the articles exhibited were merely averages, be it ever so true, would be ineffective because they would believe that they were the best that could be produced.¹⁷

The State Board of Agriculture doubtless would have been willing to cooperate with the B. & M. in attracting English immigrants to Nebraska, but the year 1874 brought problems not of the expansion of the agricultural population of the commonwealth, but of the preservation of the one already there. In the summer of 1874 Nebraska had its first serious and general crop failure. Drouth and an invasion of grasshoppers combined to do the work. The grasshoppers came, as one who saw them described it, in a haze which deepened into a gray cloud, which "suddenly . . . resolved itself into billions of . . . grasshoppers sweeping down upon the earth. The vibration of their wings filled the ear with a roaring sound like a rushing storm. As far as the eye could reach in every direction the air was filled with them. Where they lighted they covered the ground like a heavy crawling carpet. Growing crops disappeared in a single day. Trees were stripped of leaves. Potatoes, turnips and onions were pursued into the earth. Clothing and harness was cut into shreds if left exposed. . . ."¹⁸ Even on the Morton farm, in an area relatively untouched when compared to counties farther west, the white willows and apple trees were almost all stripped of their leaves.¹⁹

As president of the State Board of Agriculture, Morton urged that because of the calamity it was necessary to make the State Fair greater than ever before: "There are broad acres, in the State, of corn and other crops, now growing, which the grasshoppers have never touched. From them industry and thrift must bring the demonstration of the fertility of our soil, and the refutation of the statement that the disaster has been universal. There are many orchards

¹⁷ Hamilton A. Hill to Morton, December 30, 1873.

¹⁸ Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People*, I:494.

¹⁹ *Farm Journal*, August 22, 1874.

laden with beautiful fruits, and they too should be exhibited to verify the good name of Nebraska as an horticultural State.”²⁰

More important than a successful exhibition of produce, however, was the organization of a Relief and Aid Society to help those who had suffered from the loss of crops. The crop of 1874 was for many their first in Nebraska. The settlers depended upon their sod corn and garden truck to carry them over the first winter. With these gone, starvation seemed inevitable. Moreover, the future held no hope, for the soil was filled with eggs which would hatch more grasshoppers the next spring. Many left their claims and returned East. Their covered wagons passed through the towns bearing signs like: “Eaten out by grasshoppers, Going back East to live with wife’s folks.”²¹ The formation of an organization to prevent further exodus by helping the settlers to remain, Morton urged, should be accomplished at the State Fair. He declared, showing an early hostility to relief from public sources, that to organize such a society, “and go systematically to work to meet the results of this disaster, and take good care of those who have suffered from it,” was far better than to seek legislative relief of any kind.²²

Meanwhile, he busied himself with the composition of articles and the preparation of boxes of fruit from his own farm for exhibition in Chicago and other cities, confident that these and the State Fair would “knock stories of starvation in Nebraska higher than Beecher’s Life of Christ.”²³

Governor Furnas, in line with Morton’s suggestion regarding an aid society, appointed a committee of twenty representative men, including Morton, to solicit aid for the relief of the sufferers.²⁴ The committee met in Omaha, and Morton suggested that they organize a society under the general incorporation laws of the state. This

²⁰ Open letter, dated August 6, 1874, Nebraska City, in unamed, undated newspaper clipping, Furnas Scrapbooks, VII:114.

²¹ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I:494.

²² Open letter, August 6, 1874, *loc. cit.*

²³ Morton to A. E. Touzalin, August 29, 1874.

²⁴ Others on the committee were: Alvin Saunders, Ezra Millard, Edward Creighton, Omaha; O. H. Irish, Nebraska City; William B. Porter (Master of the State Grange), D. H. Wheeler, Plattsmouth; Amasa Cobb, S. W. Little, Lincoln; E. S. Dundy, Falls City; John L. Carson, H. C. Lett, Brownville; David Remick, Pawnee City; E. H. Rogers, Fremont; Elam Clark, Fort Calhoun; Tobias Caster, Wilbur; A. E. Touzalin, Burlington and Missouri River Railroad; O. F. Davis, Union Pacific Railroad; and J. N. Converse, Midland Pacific Railroad.—*Nebraska House Journal*, 1875, 644–646.

proposition seemed to "take." Morton, explaining his ideas to Perkins, declared it necessary to have a lawful organization and responsible men to handle it. Further, he would give the aid, not as charity, but as a loan, to be signed for with an agreement to pay it back as soon as possible: "This makes a voucher. It also makes the recipient feel like a man, making a loan, instead of a mendicant, taking alms. It enables us to say that Nebraska has no beggars, and generates no great destitution demanding charity. . . ." ²⁵

Perkins thought Morton's idea a good one, and wrote that the B. & M. would give \$2,500 to begin with, and even much more later, if necessary. The Union Pacific, he thought, should be made to agree to twice that amount.²⁶ He liked Morton's suggestion that whatever was given to the sufferers be in the form of a loan, but he was afraid it might have an adverse effect on potential donors. Many people, he thought, might abstain from giving, "saying that if the aid was to be on the basis of a loan, let the people who have money to lend do it all." ²⁷

On September 18, the Furnas committee, meeting in Lincoln, followed Morton's suggestion, and incorporated the Nebraska Relief and Aid Society. Governor Furnas was elected president of the organization; General E. O. C. Ord, commander of the corps area, vice president; E. B. Chandler, secretary; and Alvin Saunders, treasurer. On the board of directors were: Morton, Eleazer Wakeley, O. N. Ramsey, Ezra Millard, H. W. Yates, J. H. Brisbin, A. E. Touzalin, Elam Clark, W. D. Scott, Daniel H. Wheeler, and W. B. Porter.²⁸

Soon after the Relief and Aid Society was incorporated, the State Fair, which Morton thought so vital to the interests of Nebraska, was held at Omaha. Professor Arthur Latham Perry of Williams College, from whose book, *Principles of Political Economy*, Morton had quoted at length in his address the year before, delivered the annual oration. He had been persuaded to make the address by Morton, who greatly admired his work. The meeting of the two men at Omaha in the fall of 1874 was the beginning of a long

²⁵ Morton to Perkins, September 13, 1874.

²⁶ Perkins to Morton, September 15, 1874.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1874.

²⁸ *Nebraska House Journal*, 1875, 647.

friendship, which, as Morton developed his national influence, was, in turn, to give the professor considerable influence. Professor Perry addressed the drouth-and-grasshopper-stricken Grangers on "The Foes of the Farmers," listing as agriculture's primary enemies: paper money, the protective tariff, regulatory legislation, and debt.²⁹

The speech was received with enthusiasm by conservatives all over the country as a stay to the increased legislative activity it was feared the grasshoppers and the drouth would produce in the Western states. Morton declared that the State Fair was "pronounced a success," and that it would "lessen the bad impressions as to drouth and g-hoppers . . . and . . . act as a wine to . . . faith in the soil and climate of Nebraska."³⁰

Meanwhile, the Relief and Aid Society had got under way, and Morton, despite the fact that his views regarding loans had not been adopted, was enthusiastic over its prospects for success. He wrote to Perkins: ". . . [It] is just such an organization as I predicted to you we should form. It is in good hands and it is doing good." The officers of the society were almost wholly men whom he had nominated.³¹

Donations poured in from all parts of the country. By the end of the year the society had received over \$37,000 in cash, plus quantities of goods. The largest donation came from the Second National Bank of Cleveland, Ohio, and totalled \$8,555. Jay Gould sent \$2,500; the Union Pacific, \$5,000; the Burlington and Missouri, \$5,000; the *New York Tribune*, \$2,591.17. There were other large contributions. In addition to its cash gift, the B. & M. gave free transportation to all of the society's freight.³² Large shipments of goods, ranging from dress patterns, to onions, to coal, were sent into the western counties. By the close of the year the society had given away over \$22,000 worth of commodities.³³

There was some fear among conservatives that enthusiasm for aiding the stricken settlers would exceed rational bounds and would redound not to the benefit, but to the detriment of the state. Soon after the society had begun its work, Morton sensed this danger and

²⁹ A. L. Perry, "The Foes of the Farmers," Pamphlet, Morton Collection.

³⁰ Morton to Perkins, October 8, 1874.

³¹ *Ibid.*, October 8, 1874—second letter.

³² *Nebraska House Journal*, 1875, 652-657.

³³ *Ibid.*, 672.

wondered if it would not be possible "to repress volunteer beggars for Nebraska." He feared that it was "the determination of many well-disposed people to thoroughly advertise the state of Nebraska as a conglomeration of paupers and knaves," and declared that if a distinction were not made between the newly settled western counties, and the long settled counties which needed no aid, the agricultural reputation of Nebraska would be seriously harmed.³⁴

Charles E. Perkins, who was devoting the energies of his road unstintingly in aid of the sufferers, said that unless more judicious publicity regarding the destitution were used, it would "undo what we are spending so much money every day to do." In his opinion, many of the extreme stories appearing in the press regarding the extent and intensity of the suffering were "simply damned nonsense." He declared, "The fact is the dead beats are trying to make use of the grasshoppers to help themselves—& the Aid Society & the newspapers are ready to believe it all."³⁵

Morton also was fearful lest the extreme stories regarding the destitution would be used to advantage by a group in the state urging legislative aid for the farmers. He wrote to Governor Furnas: "It is to be hoped that the legislature will skip making any appropriation for charitable purposes. A precedent in that direction would be dangerous."³⁶

The same day he wrote Perkins: ". . . it seems to me now, that State aid and an appropriation by the State Legislature are imminent. If they are going to do this the B. & M. and U.P. may as well cease donations as their taxes will be a forced gift, and will amount altogether, to a large sum of money. . . ."³⁷

Legislative aid was forestalled, but the enthusiastic excesses of "the volunteer beggars" appeared to increase rather than diminish. One of the most active of these persons was a Reverend Mr. Tibbles who perambulated the country with religious zeal on behalf of the grasshoppered farmers. This same Tom Tibbles was with John Brown, became later the husband of Bright Eyes, and still later a candidate for vice president on the Populist ticket. He seems to have

³⁴ Morton to E. B. Chandler, October 31, 1874.

³⁵ Perkins to Morton, November 14, 1874.

³⁶ Morton to Furnas, November 24, 1874.

³⁷ Morton to Perkins, November 27, 1874.

had no connection with the Relief and Aid Society, but rather was a critic of that body. When O. N. Ramsey succeeded E. B. Chandler as secretary, Morton wrote: "Whatever you may do and however well and honestly you may do it, there are journalistic dogs who will bark at you and clerical curs who will snarl and yelp at your heels. But with the Right and God on your side neither Tiballs [*sic*] nor the *Bee* will be likely to prevail."³⁸

When Tibbles went to Chicago and began writing newspaper articles which Morton felt were slanderous to Chandler while "boldly and piously" endorsing the rest of the officers, Morton wrote to his fellow directors: "Neither his [Tibbles'] censure nor his praise will affect us, in my opinion, very materially. Nevertheless, I hereby respectfully tender my resignation from the directory. The Reverend Tibbles will possibly be still more rejoiced and now pronounce a benediction."³⁹

Morton's disgust with work of a public nature on behalf of agriculture seems to have been quite general in the winter of 1874-75. After being re-elected by acclamation as president of the State Board of Agriculture at the autumn meeting, he resigned, effective January 1, 1875. Consideration of the resignation was postponed until the January meeting.⁴⁰

The presidency had never been a pleasant position. There was trouble among the members of the Board. With the exception of the secretary, all of them served without salary, the only remuneration being the prestige attached. There seems to have been considerable petty bickering over prerogatives. Important members, such as Judge O. P. Mason and General J. S. Brisbin, had resigned in disgust. Governor Furnas wrote: "Unless we can rid the organization of petty spites and jealousies, its usefulness will be greatly impaired, and eventually it will be destroyed. . . . We must have *united, harmonious* effort if we succeed honorably to ourselves and beneficially to the state. . . ." ⁴¹

³⁸ Morton to O. N. Ramsey, December 19, 1874.

³⁹ Morton to the Directors of the Nebraska Relief and Aid Society, December 29, 1874.

⁴⁰ *Journal of the Proceedings of the State Board of Agriculture of the State of Nebraska*, September 4, 1873, January 26, 1876, 31.

⁴¹ Furnas to Morton, January 12, 1874.

The Board was constantly in hot water with certain sections of the press. George L. Miller, whose enmity for Governor Furnas extended to the entire Board, was sorry that Morton had ever accepted the presidency, declaring that he had been elected only as a "scheme to make . . . rottennesses respectable . . . [and] silence the *Herald* on the printing and other steals. . . ." ⁴²

Then, too, Morton felt that his work as president of the State Board of Agriculture was just as much in the interest of building up Nebraska for the B. & M. as was his editorial work; and while, of course, he had not contracted with the B. & M. to work as president of the Board, he was occupying the position, "solely at the request of Mr. Perkins," and felt that the railroad should pay his expenses and for the time expended in the work.⁴³ The railroad from time to time had paid the expenses Morton incurred in his work for the State Board; yet in 1874, there was a general feeling among the officers of the company that not only must they discontinue that practice, but that they must dispense with his services altogether.⁴⁴

When Perkins heard of Morton's contemplated resignation, however, he wrote hastily: "Why resign the Presidency of the Board. It is for the good of all of us to have you remain in—of the State, I mean—& doesn't hurt you any. A. E. T. [A. E. Touzalin] feels & so do I that our land expenses must in some way be reduced & I don't know that we can continue a fixed sum to you tho we shall expect to pay you for what you do—but I hope you will not for this reason give up the State Board. . . ." ⁴⁵

Temporarily the problem of Morton's connection with the State Board of Agriculture was settled by that body's refusal, in its January meeting, to accept his resignation as president. He had hoped that it would be accepted, but had promised Perkins that if it were not, he would "take the matter of further service under advisement." ⁴⁶

This appears to have been about all Morton did during 1875, so far as the Board was concerned. He continued to be the nominal

⁴² Miller to Mrs. Morton, September 10, 1873.

⁴³ Morton to E. A. Touzalin, November 3, 1874.

⁴⁴ Cf. Touzalin to Perkins, January 14, 1875.

⁴⁵ Perkins to Morton, January 6, 1875.

⁴⁶ Morton to Perkins, January 13, 1875.

head of the organization, but not once did he attend a meeting.⁴⁷ He made the usual annual report to the legislature. While writing it, he said that it would "advise no appropriation by State for Board of Agriculture . . . touch on g-hopper ravages lightly and make the best of the affliction."⁴⁸

The legislature received the report, but passed a resolution not to print it.⁴⁹

Finally, after a year of passive presidency, Morton decided to end the whole unpleasant connection, and in January 1876, he resigned not only from the presidency, but from membership on the Board as well. He gave as reason the fact that he could "no longer appropriate the time to the duties which are involved by a member of the Board, without doing injustice to my own affairs, and neglecting the afternoon work of a life now more than half used up. . . ."

In his valedictory, he urged upon his associates the importance of the planting of trees, the raising of corn, and the husbandry of hogs and cattle:

We cannot raise too much corn. No matter what corn may be worth as corn in the market. It may be worth five cents or nothing at all as corn. But transmuted to beef, pork, or mutton, it will always pay the husbandman a handsome and satisfactory return. This should be, and must be, if it will grow prosperous, a stock-feeding State. Wheat growing for exportation will not pay. It wears out the soil, the men who till it, and the reputation of the State; the first by taking away part of its productive power each year; the second by hard work and fretting over poor compensation; and the last by the pronounced and unyielding poverty of its citizens.

Instead of an insane blacksmith hammering cold iron in the middle of a wheat field, miles from forge and fire, the coat of arms for Nebraska might better be emblazoned with a corn field, a cattle corral, a hog pen and a sheep fold. These depict the foundation of the State's development and material prosperity.

Add to the above industries an annual awakening each succeeding April, which, upon Arbor Day, shall result in planting out more trees, both for fruit and for timber, and there can be no doubt but that at the next centennial Nebraska

⁴⁷ Cf. *Journal of Proceedings of the State Board of Agriculture of the State of Nebraska*, September 4, 1873-January 26, 1876.

⁴⁸ Morton to Furnas, December 30, 1874. Morton always looked upon his request that the legislature abstain from voting funds for the State Board of Agriculture as one of the soundest acts of his administration as president. He was opposed to aiding any industry at public expense.

⁴⁹ *Nebraska Senate Journal*, 1875, 210n.

will be the first *meat* producing member of the Union, and likewise the *best timbered* State in America. . . .⁵⁰

The double affliction of drouth and grasshoppers took heavy toll of the Granger Movement. Farmers whose fields had been stripped even of feed for their stock were in no position to make cash contributions to any kind of an organization. The situation of the Grange was complicated in certain of the Western states during the lean years by the fact that the organization had gone heavily into business enterprises of various types, an activity that contributed probably more than any other factor to the downfall of the Western granges.⁵¹

The Granger attempt to engage in business was particularly disastrous in Nebraska. As early as 1872, the state grange had made arrangements for the manufacture of headers, a machine used for a number of years in the West for gathering the heads of grain, leaving the straw standing in the fields. For a year or two it appeared that the enterprise might be successful. Then the grange expanded into the manufacture of cultivators and harvesters, and as the result of overstocking, defective machines, and bad management, it suffered a severe loss.⁵² During the grasshopper years the organization disappeared entirely from Nebraska.

The financial exigencies of the Grange temporarily inclined a number of railroad officials—especially those in the East—toward the belief that it was no longer necessary to continue their editorial efforts. Morton, on the scene, never conceded this. He admitted that the Grange might lose its existence, but knew that the ideas of its members would find expression through some other channel if that one were closed.

“ . . . There never was a time when Nebraska needed so much ink shed in her favor as now!” he wrote to Perkins in January 1875. “The ordinary advertising verbiage will not touch the public judgment at all. Editorials in largely circulating journals may do some good. . . . As a ‘grasshopper sufferer’ I should like to continue

⁵⁰ *Journal . . . State Board of Agriculture . . .*, September 4, 1873–January 26, 1876, 40–47.

⁵¹ Buck, *The Granger Movement*, 73.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 268.

on 'the fixed sum' and really think I can earn it, and have earned it. . . ." ⁵³

Although journalistic work for the Burlington was an interesting and lucrative occupation—"the fixed sum" was \$5,000 a year, plus expenses—Morton felt that his agitation against prevailing practices of local government was vital to the interests of the state. As he phrased it to Perkins: "In a few years the inquiry of each emigrant will be not as to land, not as to water nor climate but 'How much is your county bonded for: how much your precinct or district and what are your taxes on the dollar's valuation?'" ⁵⁴

Whether others thought the Grange was dying or not, Morton continued his editorial battle against it. He used the apathy of the National Grange during the early months of the work of the Relief and Aid Society, to proclaim that the national officers, "the plow-boys of Pennsylvania Avenue," did not take as much interest in the grasshopper sufferers as did the railroads:

. . . So far, neither the grasshoppered granger in Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, or Dakota has enjoyed any gifts from the National Grange in the way of a redistribution of its currency. So far the grand officers, Messrs. Adams and Kelley, seem so overcome by the calamities which have overtaken the cultivators and harvesters in the states named that they are as dumfounded and silent as to aid for the grasshoppered districts as Gen. Grant is about the third term. . . .

It will begin to be suspected that the National Grange is a national humbug, a sort of huge "bunko" establishment, which, instead of beguiling solitary grangers into the throwing away of money, as do the Mike McDonald sort of concerns in Chicago, has roped in the whole agricultural population at once, and swindled it in an aggregated form and most aggravated manner.⁵⁵

Regardless of what they thought about the future of the Grange, the C. B. & Q. kept Morton in its employ, and he continued the practice of sending communications on public questions to the newspapers.

In an effort to reassure possible immigrants that the devastations of 1874 had been only temporary, he made a trip on August 14 over the line of the B. & M. in Nebraska, and from each station sent telegraphic messages to the *Omaha Herald* on the prospects for a crop in 1875. The reports were highly optimistic. Hopes for a

⁵³ Morton to Perkins, January 13, 1875.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Chicago Times*, n.d., [1874?] (Morton Scrapbooks).

bountiful crop were "without precedent"; grasshoppers had not been "seen or heard of." ⁵⁶

Though the particular stations which Morton visited may have escaped, actually the grasshoppers had done great damage in the spring of 1875. On Morton's own farm in May they were, according to its owner, "thicker . . . than fools and knaves in political offices," which, being further elucidated, meant, "thick and numerous beyond computation or expressive description; sands on the sea-shore, fleas on a dog, lice on an Indian, leaves of the forest, stars of the firmament all added together and then multiplied by the enumeration table." They cleaned out forty acres of oats and a field of alfalfa clover. They ate all the verbenas in Mrs. Morton's garden, and as Morton was writing, seemed to be "leering through the window panes at the house plants, plainly saying, in an imperious tone of voice, 'pass us out a rose geranium or some floral *bon bon*; we are sick of your damned field fodder.' " ⁵⁷

Over the pseudonym "Orchardist," Morton wrote long letters to the *Chicago Times* extolling the virtues of Nebraska as an agricultural state. The dry weather and grasshoppers of 1874, he maintained, while badly damaging the reputation of Nebraska as a farming state, gave no reason for believing that its future was anything but "assuredly . . . prosperous and honorable . . . in horticulture and agriculture." ⁵⁸

Morton, as illustrated by his newspaper articles, always maintained the greatest confidence in Nebraska's soil and climate. In her politics, by the same token, he had but little.

As an example of his views on the latter subject, the constitutional convention of 1875, called to revise the altogether inadequate instrument on which the state had been admitted into the Union, seemed to Morton to be an expression of the nadir of political incompetence.

He had been asked to run for membership in the convention, but had refused with the declaration that he would "never—under any

⁵⁶ *Omaha Herald*, August 15, 1875.

⁵⁷ Morton to Miller, May 18, 1875.

⁵⁸ *Chicago Times*, April 1875.

circumstances—beg the good people of Otoe Co for an office, either of a state or county character.”⁵⁹

When the convention adopted a constitution that gave the legislature the power to set maximum freight and passenger rates, Morton wrote in the *Chicago Times*: “It has been left for the great and growing West to develop and evolve a fundamental law which, in its provisions, indicates the existence in the State of Nebraska of an organized, active, and influential idiocy.” He said that upon reading the constitution of Nebraska one could not but conclude that “the element of dampfoolism is remarkably vigorous in those parts.”

The regulatory provision he declared to be, “an absolute prohibition of the railroad development of that state by corporations having money of their own. . . . A red flag and a sign ‘Smallpox here,’ would not more effectually prevent intrusive calls at a private residence than will this red flag of communism, hung out by Nebraska, prevent the development of that state by a general investment in its railroad system.”⁶⁰

In addition to his regular newspaper work, Morton was using his pen in the latter half of 1875 in the preparation of what was to be his most ambitious expression on the problem of railroads and the people. This was a thirty-six page pamphlet entitled: “Railroads and Their Relations to the Public. A Colloquy Between a Farmer, a Government Official and a Railroad Superintendent.”

The idea of expounding the railroad’s position in the form of a conversation appears to have originated in the fertile brain of Charles E. Perkins. He wrote long letters of suggestion and advice. It was not his purpose merely to have the railroad side presented, but, believing that the railroad’s position was the correct one, he wanted, by full and free argument, to convince others of that fact. True, he wanted the material “slanted” in favor of the railroads, yet he was vitally concerned that the arguments of the opposition be answered carefully and convincingly, and urged that even the delicate questions be discussed.

The question of “pooling” was one which was beginning to agitate the public mind to a great extent, and Perkins wrote that it

⁵⁹ Morton to Joy Morton, March 17, 1875.

⁶⁰ December 11, [1875?].

"must be squarely met & overcome. . . . Pooling is strongly defensible & it must be met." ⁶¹ According to him, the practice was necessary and desirable because it prevented ruinous competition and it stabilized rates. Any excesses in rates would be automatically curbed by the operation of enlightened self-interest: railroads "would be foolish" to put rates "above a point at which business can be done with profit—that is above the point of stimulating trade." ⁶²

Again he wrote: "Try to think whether there is any way, practicable, in which the Govt. could farm out the right to build & operate Railroads & limit either the charges or the dividends." ⁶³

Morton replied that he had "thought of this faithfully," but that holding the opinions he did regarding the necessity of complete commercial freedom, he could see no practical way for the government to build, operate, or regulate the rates of railroads. ⁶⁴

Perkins felt it necessary to warn Morton against the use of too colorful language: "R R men are not often gifted with oratorical power & you must be careful not to make our supt too flowery—& you must also guard against *flippancy*. . . . It dont do to be *trivial* in so grave a matter as this, where our aim is to *convince* & not to amuse." ⁶⁵

Morton followed Perkins' views assiduously, both as to style and content, and when the "Colloquy" was finally finished, it seemed to the latter to be "a good child with pretty perfect limbs." ⁶⁶

The pamphlet was published anonymously, "for sale on the Cars," at ten cents a copy. Perkins thought that many would read it at ten cents who would not if it were given free—"Such is the human mind." ⁶⁷

Morton does not appear to have been particularly proud of the work, and indeed, it has little of the fire that was customary in his writing. The exposition was clear, rather than colorful; and if in a measure convincing, it was not entertaining. Morton was not a man to work well under direction from another. Having adopted Per-

⁶¹ Perkins to Morton, September 3, 1875.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, December 15, 1875.

⁶⁴ Morton to Perkins, December 27, 1875.

⁶⁵ Perkins to Morton, November 6, 1875.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, December 15, 1875.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, November 15, 1875.

kins' ideas and Perkins' views as to style, his function was little more than that of an editor. The controversial newspaper article was Morton's forte, not cold and logical argument.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PRIVATE CITIZEN IN WASHINGTON

BEGINNING IN 1875, MORTON supplemented his work as a railroad publicist with other types of activity on behalf of the Burlington. The first of these was an attempt to sell, on a commission basis, the \$150,000 of eight per cent bonds granted the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Iowa by Otoe County.¹

The bonds issued to its subsidiary in Iowa had proved of very little value to the C. B. & Q. Their validity had been contested in the courts, and it had been necessary for the railroad to carry the case to the Supreme Court of the United States to have them finally validated.² During the litigation, unpaid interest had so accumulated that the county was forced to authorize a sixty thousand dollar funding issue to provide for it.

Morton was given an option on the bonds soon after they were placed beyond litigation, and immediately had them registered with the Auditor of the State of Nebraska. Even this detail—in keeping with the many vexations caused by the bonds—necessitated much delay. After having had all necessary information sent to the Auditor, Morton wrote that official with just a touch of impatience: "Tell me, if you please, what day I shall come to Lincoln? I have now been three weeks endeavoring to lay a foundation for the registra-

¹ See p. 173.

² Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company vs. County of Otoe, 16 Wallace 667.

tion of these bonds and have been expected in Chicago with them for ten days." ³

The details of registration having been consummated, Morton attempted to market the securities. This proved a trying and fruitless task. Brokers with whom he corresponded were willing to take the bonds but were doubtful as to the possibility of selling them at a satisfactory price. One firm in New York wrote that there were two factors in the way of a prompt sale in that city. One was the lack of ready money for investment; the other, the default in interest on so many county bonds which had made prospective buyers hesitant. They were willing to take them, but reminded Morton: "There are a good many bonds . . . for sale and offered at very low prices." ⁴

A broker in Philadelphia wrote that the bonds of counties in Western states had no ratable value in that city, and while there was "any amount" of capital there, it could not be drawn into circulation except for "Govt or other first class securities." ⁵ A few days later, after having tried unsuccessfully to find a purchaser, he wrote: "A lack both of knowledge of and confidence in the counties of new and distant states is common in this part of our country. Indeed the remark may be repeated respecting the States themselves." ⁶

It was discouraging work. Morton asked a relatively high price: eighty cents and up; most of the brokers felt they could not get that much, despite Morton's declarations that Otoe County was in "good shape." ⁷

Lorenzo Dow, of New York, with whom Morton had most of his dealings, urged that inasmuch as there appeared to be no ready market for the bonds in the United States, they be sent to London for placement. Finally, he agreed that if they were sent to Baring Brothers and were not sold, he would assume all the charges.⁸ Dow himself went to England and spent two months in an unsuccessful attempt to sell the securities. Nebraska county bonds had an unsavory reputation in London; trouble in Turkey, and rumors of war

³ Morton to J. B. Weston, April 30, 1875.

⁴ Saunders & Hardenbergh, New York, to Morton, May 1, 1875.

⁵ D. L. Collier to Morton, August 28, 1875.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 8, 1875.

⁷ Morton to Kountze Brothers, New York, January 17, 1876.

⁸ Dow to Morton, May 6, 1876.

made the British investor hesitant; their best prospect suffered from a serious illness. In August 1876, Dow returned to New York, leaving the negotiations in the hands of a London banker.⁹

Meanwhile, the presence of the bonds in London caused increasing anxiety to Morton and the C. B. & Q. As early as July they had asked that the securities either be sold soon or returned.¹⁰ When in November they were still in London and still unsold, Morton wrote to Dow: "More than six months have elapsed since the Bonds went to London. All that time I have been *very* anxious to consummate the sale; and all that time have been promising, on the strength of my faith in you, a speedy sale. The end must come soon. . . . Cable me something definite on receipt of this, say you can and will sell right off or can not." ¹¹

The bonds came back from London. The very sick man with whom Dow was negotiating died, and Otoe County defaulted on another interest payment. The default, Morton was informed by all of the brokers with whom he had been negotiating, damaged almost beyond repair chances of selling the securities at any price anywhere. Morton held the option until 1878, but was unable to place the securities. Discouraged, he wrote to George Tyson, general auditor of the C. B. & Q., "There is not much inquiry for them. I have had an option on them for a long time and endeavored faithfully to sell them, but without much avail. They are only eight percents and always in the lurch on interest. . . . Moreover there is—owing to the litigious disposition which this people has evinced—a suspicion all the time of further attempted repudiation." ¹²

The wearying and unprofitable experience with the Otoe County bonds impressed upon Morton the validity of his oft-repeated assertion in the press that the political interference by the Western states in the management of private capital was ruinous to their hope of material development with aid from the East or Europe. His experience left him fearful for the future of public securities.

"I would not advise my Mother, my sister, nor any friend, who seeks a certain income, to invest in Otoe County bonds, nor in any

⁹ *Ibid.*, August 24, 1876.

¹⁰ Morton to Dow, July 10, 1876.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, November 22, 1876.

¹² Morton to Tyson, July 5, 1878.

other county bonds," he wrote to George L. Miller in 1879. "... The populace are a bad thing to rest upon, for income; when they have the power they kick over tax levys and tax collections. There will be trouble between the bondholding class and the tax-paying class which will make such securities very precarious property to depend upon for a living." ¹³

Morton wrote occasional editorials on behalf of corporate capital during the time he was busy in the attempt to place the Otoe County bonds. The Burlington also began to employ him to look after certain of its interests in Washington.

His first job of this nature was to represent the C. B. & Q., and the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific railroads in a negotiation over compensation for carrying the mails. The two roads had been carrying Sunday mail between Chicago and Council Bluffs for some time at a compensation of \$25,000 a year, when in 1875 the Post Office Department suddenly stopped payment on the grounds that compensation for such service was not authorized. Even so, the Department held that as long as Sunday trains were run, the mails should have the advantage of the service without compensation.¹⁴ The Burlington argued that since its train had been put on largely because of the mail contract, taking it off because of the loss of mail revenue would cause complaint, as "the public had come to regard it as a necessity and would make trouble if we shd take it off." ¹⁵

Morton went to Washington in June to see what he could do about the matter. He was not enthusiastic about the trip, or optimistic as to his chances for success. The food in the eating houses along the Baltimore and Ohio seems to have disagreed with him. It was hot in Washington, and he was sick in bed part of the time he was there.¹⁶ The railroads had decided that their best chance was to get a special bill through Congress authorizing compensation for the Sunday mail service and although two days after his arrival he wrote

¹³ Morton to Miller, October 23, 1879.

¹⁴ James Tyner, Second Assistant Postmaster General, to Robert Harris, July 6, 1875.

¹⁵ Perkins to Morton, July 22, 1878. This letter sets forth a brief history of the difficulty.

¹⁶ Diary, June 4-12, 1876.

to his wife that he wanted to "get away from this deluge of damphools" as soon as possible,¹⁷ he worked hard to interest various congressmen in the bill. He was on friendly terms with Nebraska's Senator Paddock, who appeared willing to help. His old friend, Daniel W. Voorhees, who had aided him in his attempt to gain a seat in Congress back in 1862, was in Washington and willing to do what he could. A bill was introduced allowing the continued compensation.

The bill having been started, Morton left for home, sick with diarrhea. After stopping over in New York to see about the Otoe County bonds, and in Chicago to report to the officials of the railroad, he arrived at home June 20, still ill and suffering.¹⁸ He had promised his fellow citizens in Otoe County to address them upon the centennial celebration of Independence Day, and most of his time until the Fourth of July was spent in recovering his health and preparing his speech.

The speech over, Morton did not return immediately to Washington, but remained at home. He took a trip along the route of the B. & M., and sent telegrams to the *Chicago Times* on crop prospects.¹⁹ On August 9, he left for Chicago, and then went on to New York to see about the ever-present unplaced Otoe County bonds.²⁰ It was only upon receipt of an urgent message from Perkins, declaring that the bill was lagging and it was important to get it through at this session,²¹ that Morton returned to Washington. Perkins' message had come too late. Congress adjourned the day Morton arrived in the "godly city" of Washington and the bill died with adjournment.²² In the same letter, however, Morton reported favorably on the possibilities of the success of another measure in which Perkins was interested. He had had as his travelling companion on the return from Washington Lorenzo Crounse, Nebraska's representative in Congress. (This man was later to defeat Morton and Van Wyck in the gubernatorial race of 1892.) Crounse had "expressed himself confident that the *pro rata* bill would come

¹⁷ Morton to Mrs. Morton, June 7, 1876.

¹⁸ Arbor Lodge Journal, June 20, 1876.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, August 5, 1876.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, August 9, 17, 1876.

²¹ Perkins to Morton, no date.

²² Morton to Perkins, September 2, 1876.

up on call of the Committee early next session and with judicious management, pass the House with a fair majority."

Crounse had introduced the *pro rata* bill during the first session of the Forty-fourth Congress. Its purpose was to make the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, for the purposes of rate making, a branch of the Union Pacific; and it provided that the Union Pacific should charge the same rate per mile between Kearney and points west on freight and passengers arriving at Kearney over the B. & M. as it did for freight and passengers reaching that point over its own line.²³ In other words, the Union Pacific was to abandon its discrimination against the B. & M. in fixing its rates westward from Kearney, the point of junction between the two roads. The bill was of great importance to the B. & M., because it would provide it with an outlet to the West. It was important to southeastern Nebraska, because under existing circumstances, its shipments, after paying charges over the B. & M. to Kearney were forced by the Union Pacific to pay as much from Kearney as they would have paid had they come all the way from Omaha over that road.

During Morton's stay at home in the summer of 1876, he began to agitate the question of *pro rata*, and predicted to Perkins that it would "soon be a topic of general discussion" in the state.²⁴ His first public expression on the subject was in the form of a long letter to the *Omaha Herald* in which he discussed the ever-growing market for agricultural products being developed by the mines of Colorado, at the same time pointing out that the farmers of southeastern Nebraska, by the action of the Union Pacific were "walled out, as by adamant, from commercial relations with the mines by the mere caprice or avarice of a corporation whose breath and blood is a public donation."

The Crounse bill, he declared, was "merely a request to secure equity," and to force the Union Pacific, created by the public, to act in the public interest. He concluded:

For one, as I see this matter today, I am ready to make this question a general one, as it is a vital one, and carry it into the political discussions of the State and

²³ *Congressional Record*, Forty-fourth Congress, First Session, 93.

²⁴ Morton to Perkins, June 29, 1876.

to the polls in order that the right to get to market over a road which they have helped to construct may be fully secured to the people of Southern Nebraska.

[It is my sincere wish] that you give this a place in the widely-read *Omaha Daily Herald* and correct all errors of fact or of judgment which may seem visible to you, and also fully and freely define your position upon this whole matter.

...²⁵

This letter was the beginning of a deep rift in the friendship between Morton and George L. Miller, two men who had worked in harmony since their arrival in the Territory of Nebraska over twenty years before. Dr. Miller who had consistently defended the Union Pacific interests, printed the letter, but with it a long editorial, declaring that the *pro rata* bill had been introduced by Congressman Crounse "for the purpose of sectionalizing his strength as a candidate for the United States Senate," and that evidently Morton proposed to become "a fighting coadjutor of Mr. Crounse." Under such circumstances, the *Herald* felt that it must limit its response to Morton's request for a free and full discussion "to an expression of sincere regret that he has determined to intrude into the opening campaign of Nebraska a question that is so utterly foreign to it." The editorial went on:

. . . and that Mr. Morton, after the much he has done in the years that have gone to allay sectional strife in this State, should appear in a direct attempt to revive them, and especially at such a juncture as this, is so strange that we are confused to know the real meaning of it. In the interest of the B. & M. in Nebraska railroad corporation he is certainly exercising only his undoubted right and discharging his plain duty in advocating the *pro-rata* law upon which Mr. Crounse seeks to vault into the Senate over the heads of his political rivals, but if it be Mr. Morton's purpose to sectionalize the Democratic Party of this State in leading in a political war of one railroad corporation upon another, we must take issue with him at the threshold. . . .²⁶

Morton replied quickly:

. . . as to my purpose. It is not to "sectionalize the Democratic party." That venerable organization did not intrude itself upon my mind at all when I addressed my former article to *The Herald*. Nor was it my ambition to help Mr. Crounse "vault"—as you circumsily put it—"over the heads of political rivals" into the Senate. . . . The best evidence that I had no intention of backing the able and erudite Mr. Crounse as against the able and erudite Mr. Hitchcock, may be

²⁵ *Omaha Herald*, July 4, 1876.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

found in the fact that those two statesmen agree on the *pro rata* bill now before Congress. . . .

But it is my purpose to agitate this matter until the whole people fully comprehend the justice of the proposed measure, and the injustice which delays the time of its becoming a law. It is a political question because it concerns the prosperity and profits of the people. It is not a party question, because men may do wrong and belong to either party, and do right, and yet be kicked out of either. As citizens, not partisans, we will discuss this matter. . . .²⁷

After some weeks of discussion, during which the *Herald* called the Burlington "the arch-enemy to every interest that Omaha should deem worth preserving,"²⁸ Miller wrote to Morton: "Let us be frank & friendly in this business. Your zeal for your client should not lead you to expect me to favor a scheme that is certain to be hurtful to my own people and section. It is your right and duty to do your best for your company. I do not doubt this, but when the B. & M. strikes at Union Pacific interests it strikes at Omaha interests, and this is the whole matter, so far as I am concerned. . . ." ²⁹

When Congress assembled in December, Morton was in Washington for the B. & M. On hand for the Union Pacific was Sidney Dillon. Pushing the bill from the Judiciary Committee was Representative George McCrary of Iowa; opposing it was William P. Frye of Maine, whom Morton described as "the jumping jack of Blaine who moves automatically when the Union Pacific Lobby winds him up and greases him." ³⁰

On the third day of the session, McCrary reported the bill out of committee and urged its passage.³¹ Morton, reporting to Perkins, declared that Speaker Randall did all in his power to help them through with the bill, "but that inimitable squirt Frye of Maine, puppy dog of Blaine, gabbled until the morning hour . . . expired and we . . . went over. . . ." ³²

The bill came up again on December 13, with Lorenzo Crounse leading the fight for its passage. The proposition, he declared, was a simple one: "Here are two roads built by the munificence of the Government. We ask that they may be made to subserve a public

²⁷ *Ibid.*, July [8?], 1876.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, August 23, 1876.

²⁹ Miller to Morton, September 6, 1876.

³⁰ Morton to Perkins, September 8, 1876.

³¹ *Congressional Record*, Forty-fourth Congress, First Session, 93-95.

³² Morton to Perkins, December 7, 1876.

purpose. To-day one practices a monopoly of the grossest kind and one that can only be reached here in the halls of Congress."

The opposition, contending that the conflict was not one between a railroad company and the people, but "a conflict between two great railroad corporations, and the interests of the people only come in incidentally," sought to defeat the bill by amending it to death and referring it back to the committee. In this latter effort they were successful.³³

Anticipating the long struggle that would be necessary to get the bill back on the floor of the House, Morton wrote Mayor John A. Tomlin asking authority to represent Nebraska City before the Judiciary Committee. He declared the legislation "of vital importance to Nebraska City to Otoe County and to every person in Southern Nebraska," and urged that resolutions endorsing the bill be passed not only in the Council "but by the people in mass meetings all over the southern part of the state."³⁴

The authority was forthcoming immediately, along with the sentiment that "The importance of this . . . bill cannot be too highly estimated as conducive to the future growth & material prosperity of our city, and for your efforts in its behalf . . . we tender you the thanks of the Council & Community. . . ." ³⁵

In Washington, Morton arranged for Daniel W. Voorhees to help him. This Perkins approved. The Vice President and General Manager urged that it was of the "utmost importance" that they prevent the bill from being materially amended.³⁶ When it appeared that the bill was going to be reported back with amendments designed by the Union Pacific, Perkins wired that it would be better to put it off entirely for a year than to have it passed in an amended form.³⁷ In order to help forestall the latter action, Perkins himself came to Washington in January. The Burlington appears to have been successful, for the bill was not on the floor of the House again during the Forty-fourth Congress.

In the meantime a bill similar to the one proposed by Mr. Crounse had been introduced in the Senate by William B. Allison

³³ *Congressional Record*, Forty-fourth Congress, First Session, 174-177.

³⁴ Morton to John A. Tomlin, December 13, 1876.

³⁵ Tomlin to Morton, December 22, 1876.

³⁶ Perkins to Morton, December 20, 1876.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, January 10, 1877.

of Iowa, and had been favorably reported by the Judiciary Committee, but before anything further could be done, Congress adjourned.

Meanwhile, the officials of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, in Boston, negotiated an agreement with the Union Pacific whereby all local business was to be *pro rated* from Kearney Junction east and west on both roads. This, Perkins thought, would suspend the fight for some time.³⁸

Morton was disappointed in the compromise settlement. For one thing, he had hoped that in conducting an all-out publicity campaign against the Union Pacific, he might be able to convince the B. & M. to employ Robert W. Furnas in their behalf. Furnas, whose political activity had caused him to neglect his personal business, had suffered financially during the past few years, and was in need of extra employment. Morton wanted to aid him, and at the same time, he felt that Furnas would be of great assistance to the railroad.

Also, Morton was not in the *pro rata* conflict solely as a representative of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad. He looked upon the measure as vital to the producing interests of southeastern Nebraska. He did not want the question to be permanently solved by the compromise worked out between the two roads. After hearing from Perkins that because of the settlement they could not employ Furnas,³⁹ he was forced to write the latter, "The scheme I had for your employment seems to have, for the present, been exploded by a cessation of hostilities between the belligerent railroads of the country."⁴⁰ He followed the letter with one which urged: "Do not let up on *pro rata*. Because Gould & Perkins stop is a good reason why the people should proceed with the fight."⁴¹

Furthermore, Morton was opposed to dropping *pro rata* because he was afraid that if it did not succeed on a satisfactory basis, the Union Pacific might be able to buy out the B. & M. "Such a sale," he wrote his son, Joy, "will end southern Nebraska commercially."⁴²

Furnas used his influence with the Brownville *Advertiser* to keep that paper interested in *pro rata*, and Morton, through articles in the *Press* and *News* of Nebraska City, kept the question before the

³⁸ Perkins to Morton, April 7, 1877.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Morton to Furnas, April 11, 1877.

⁴¹ April 13, 1877.

⁴² Morton to Joy Morton, March 1, 1877.

people of Otoe County. Finally, Perkins was constrained to write: "I am afraid the only effect of yr controversy in the newspapers about pro rata will be bad & think it would be best to drop it all for the present." ⁴³

Morton replied that the newspaper discussion had about ended anyway, but declared it had been successful: "It has helped open the stupid eyes of many grangers and the question is popularized more than it ever was before." ⁴⁴

Pro rata threatened to push Morton once again into politics. By nature of the solution required for it, the issue was a political one. Its relation to practical politics in Nebraska was intensified by the fact that in the midst of the struggle—January 1877—a senatorial election took place. Phineas W. Hitchcock, the incumbent, was seeking re-election. Morton was opposed to Hitchcock first, as a representative of the B. & M. who thought the senior Senator too easily influenced by Jay Gould and Sidney Dillon of the Union Pacific, second, as a Democrat who disapproved of Hitchcock's political affiliations.

The election of Alvin Saunders, while by no means pleasing, was more palatable than the re-election of Hitchcock would have been.

Morton remained in Washington during the winter and made no attempt to exercise any influence in the senatorial business. Earlier, when he had been asked if he had any desire to succeed Hitchcock, he had replied: ". . . *not very much*!! The truth is I am not a very orthodox partisan and frequently commit the crime of thinking for myself instead of permitting a 'caucus' to think for me. Moreover I have never been a candidate for any office since Nebraska was admitted into the Union and would not, today, get down into the puddle of partyism, and smear myself with its mire, for all the Senatorships ever to be filled from Nebraska. . . ." ⁴⁵

The senatorial question in 1877 affected Morton immediately and directly only because it caused further hard feeling between himself and Dr. Miller. Shortly before the legislature was scheduled

⁴³ Perkins to Morton, April 30, 1877.

⁴⁴ Morton to Perkins, May 2, 1877.

⁴⁵ Morton to J. W. Allen, November 20, 1876.

to begin its balloting, Morton had written Miller that he hoped "the great state of Gould and Dillon may not intensify the vacuum now incarnate in Senator Hitchcock with the dumping into it of some other specimen of Italicised Idiocy." ⁴⁶

Miller, in the *Herald*, rejoiced over the fact that the Democrats in the legislature had voted "solid, first, last and all the time" for a Democrat;⁴⁷ but it was no secret that he had tried to swing the Democrats of Douglas County to Hitchcock. Miller himself admitted as much to Morton, though he attempted to justify his action by declaring that he had been "ordered" by the national heads of the party to act as he did. In a postscript, mailed later, he added: "You appear to be animated by a very selfish animosity in your hatred of the Union Pacific interest. The company which you so faithfully serve may demand this of you. I do not, personally, object. . . . I do not understand your new zeal for Democratic unity unless it is inspired by Mr. C. E. Perkins and the B. & M. corporation." ⁴⁸

Morton simply would not believe that the national leaders had interfered in Nebraska as Miller claimed: ". . . I have too much respect for the ability and integrity of Mr. Tilden . . . to believe, for a single moment that he ever 'ordered' a coalition so foul and rank as the one which was required to re-spawn Hitchcock upon the Senate. . . . Evidently you have been 'confidenced' or 'bull-dozed' into the attempted perpetration of a blunder, or a crime . . . and you had better quickly endeavor to ascertain who bamboozled you into the demented condition or credulity which caused you to write me that 'our leaders ordered' a union, a coalition of Democrats with rotten radicals to raise Hitchcock again to the Senate." ⁴⁹

Such letters were not calculated to inspire mutual good will. Miller was in Washington during the exciting days of February 1877, when it still was uncertain whether Hayes or Tilden would occupy the White House. Morton did not see him often, and he reported to his wife that he was "quite independent" of him.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Morton to Miller, January 15, 1877.

⁴⁷ Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People*, I:537-538.

⁴⁸ Miller to Morton, January 27, 1877.

⁴⁹ Morton to Miller, January 31, 1877.

⁵⁰ Morton to Mrs. Morton, February 10, 1877.

Miller, on the other hand, sent articles to his paper criticising a certain "pioneer," "and one of the ablest" citizens of Nebraska, for acting as "Chief of the B. & M. lobby" while "representing himself as working for the people."⁵¹

Knowledge of the quarrel soon spread, and got so far that certain Omaha Democrats opposed to Miller even approached Morton in the hope that he might start a Democratic paper in competition with the *Herald*. This hope Morton quickly scotched.

"Never in any moment insane or sane have I contemplated the establishment of a Democratic newspaper at Omaha, 'as a business undertaking,' " he wrote to Charles H. Brown who had broached the subject to him. "In my opinion it would be an 'undertaking' business, financially. . . . Personally, I hardly deem it possible for me to be made to see anything in a newspaper at Omaha very tempting."⁵²

Morton by no means was ready to re-enter the lists of active partisans as a result of the political aspects of the *pro rata* struggle and his quarrel with Dr. Miller; yet from this time forward he exhibited an increasing interest in partisan politics and the affairs of the Democratic Party. By the summer of 1878, when it came time to prepare for the off-year congressional elections, his interest appears to have been developed to a higher degree than at any time since 1868. He had lost the enthusiasm for fiat money displayed a decade earlier while aiding George H. Pendleton in his attempt to get the presidential nomination.⁵³ Really, he had been a hard money man before his close association with Pendleton, and it is probable that relations with such men as Perkins and Walker, in addition to his own thinking, brought him back to the sound money line again. At any rate, in August he wrote W. W. Wardell, a prominent Falls City Democrat, that in his opinion the best way to make a campaign was "to avow a firm and faithful adherence to honest coin money worth a hundred cents purchasing power wherever civilization has carried commerce."

⁵¹ See Morton to Thomas Morton, February 18, 1877.

⁵² Morton to Charles H. Brown, May 12, 1877.

⁵³ See pp. 148-151.

In addition, he urged upon Mr. Wardell many of the ideas he had been advocating in his newspaper articles and speeches during the past few years:

. . . to proclaim against subsidies either in lands, bonds, or money to private corporations by either county, state or national enactment; to declare for free trade and against the policy or party which favors protection of any one or two industries at the tax of all others; to affirm that capital and labor are mutually dependent and that their relations can, and will be best established by economic laws instead of State Statutes; to declare for a marked reduction in the cost of government in towns, counties and the State in order that local taxation may be made a less burden; to manifest by the nomination of able and reputable men that Nebraska has been managed by mediocrity long enough and that now is a good time to begin a change.⁵⁴

At the same time he wrote Charles H. Brown urging the necessity of a better Democratic organization in the state. He thought a mass convention, called for consultation prior to the regular delegate convention, might result in an active central committee. This was necessary if the Democrats ever were to achieve any success in the state: "A nominated ticket, with no committee at work in the field, is mere moonshine."⁵⁵

Though there was some sentiment in the Democratic Convention in favor of nominating him as candidate for Congress, Morton's advice regarding policies did not prevail. The fiat money men maintained their hold on the party. In order to combat them, Morton wrote his old friend Lyman Richardson, Dr. Miller's associate on the *Omaha Herald*, that through the paper, the Democrats "who plunged the organization of their party into the Greenback lunacy," should be invited to speak in Omaha: "The higher a monkey can be made to climb the better the view which can be obtained of his posterior peculiarities. And the more greenbackers are lifted up oratorically, this campaign, the plainer will their idiocy develop itself. They cannot be killed more effectually than by their own speeches."⁵⁶

The letter was answered not by Richardson, but by Dr. Miller, who thought it a good time to "break the ice in re-opening our suspended correspondence." He wrote that he had responded to Morton's suggestion in the *Herald*, and by that token wished to indicate

⁵⁴ Morton to Wardell, August 8, 1878.

⁵⁵ Morton to Brown, August 14, 1878.

⁵⁶ Morton to Lyman Richardson, October 9, 1878.

that he had forgotten their past differences as fully as he could, and invited what he intended to practice: "open-hearted, open-handed dealing." Turning to things political he reported that the committee was just getting around to meet, "to organize victory with the campaign mostly over."⁵⁷

Morton accepted the Doctor's offer, and soon the two men were corresponding frequently, though with a certain reserve which had not characterized their earlier letters. Miller, for example, never used the old familiar greetings, "Dear Morton," or "Dear Sterling," but always, "Dear Mr. Morton."

Despite the fact that the State Central Committee was in the hands of greenbackers, who, as Miller reported, were busily occupied in "putting down Morton and Miller," Morton could have had a place on the party's ticket had he desired it. On October 5, a large number of his fellow citizens in Otoe County petitioned him to run for the state senate.⁵⁸ He might give advice; he might express real concern over the party's course; but he was not ready, yet, to plunge again into the *melée* of an active campaign—at least not for a place in the state senate.

"In so far, only, as I might be conforming to your wishes," he answered his friends, "it would be agreeable to comply with your request. . . . But the candidacy which you propose—when vitalized by the efforts and labor which you so generously promise—might possibly result in my election and that is a danger which I must, at this time, studiously avoid. . . . Justly, I cannot accept your generous offer, because—prior to its reception—I had made business engagements—incompatible with such acceptance—which I cannot now annul."⁵⁹

The business engagements alluded to involved journeys which took Morton again to Washington, though this time not primarily in the interests of the C. B. & Q. He still maintained his connection with the Burlington, however, looking after whatever interests they desired, and the day he left for Washington had written Charles E.

⁵⁷ Miller to Morton, October 14, 1878.

⁵⁸ Petition in Morton Collection.

⁵⁹ October 9, 1878.

Perkins that in an effort to forestall legislation regulating rates in Nebraska he had "started a temperance discussion, involving legislation, by the publication of several editorials against prohibitory laws and in favor of the Moffet Bell Punch system of taxing drinks." He thought that this along with the revenue laws, the lower-rate-of-interest enactments, and road laws would "keep the newspapers and statute inventors occupied for some time."⁶⁰

It was for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad that he went to Washington. Henry Strong, who had first met Morton when as an attorney for the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad he had visited Nebraska with Charles E. Perkins in 1866 to ascertain the advisability of building into the state,⁶¹ and who since, through association with him as an official of the Burlington, had become a close friend, had been made vice president and general manager of the Santa Fe. It evidently was through his influence that Morton was employed by that road.

The work to which he directed his attention in December was largely a continuation of work begun the previous spring, during the second session of the Forty-fifth Congress. The Santa Fe was moving into New Mexico in an effort to reach the Pacific, and hired Morton to take care of all matters in Washington that might affect, one way or the other, their continued march southwest.

Legislation in which the officials of the Santa Fe had been greatly interested during the second session was the bill requiring the Union Pacific Railroad to create a sinking fund to guarantee its obligation to the government. The Santa Fe's interest, as Thomas Nickerson, president of the road, explained it to Morton, grew out of the hope that if the Union Pacific were required to use a portion of its earnings to build up such a fund, it would "not have so much money, with which to ruin smaller corporations."⁶²

Nickerson had hoped that considerable pressure in favor of passage of the bill would be brought by Senators Ingalls and Plumb of Kansas, generally looked upon as friends of the Santa Fe, their state's most important railroad. Possibly because of the influence of Jay Gould, possibly because Morton, the Santa Fe's representative in

⁶⁰ Morton to Perkins, December 9, 1878.

⁶¹ See p. 171.

⁶² Thomas Nickerson to Morton, April 8, 1878.

Washington, failed to make any overtures in their direction whatsoever—probably because of both reasons—the Senators from Kansas surprised Mr. Nickerson by voting against the Funding Bill, and prompted him to complain: “These two Gentlemen profess to feel very much interest in our Extension, but at the same time by relieving Jay Gould on the sinking fund they are furnishing him with power to slaughter us. ‘The ways of Politicians are past finding out.’ ”⁶³

He also made it clear that he disapproved of Morton’s action in the matter: “I cannot yet fully appreciate the wisdom of your policy in holding yourself aloof from the Kansas Delegation where you might have the power of influencing them in a matter so plain as this.” Morton, however, had had no use for Kansas politicians since the days before the Civil War when he had thrown Jim Lane out of the *Nebraska City News* office during one of Jim’s forays across the border. He was not an active political partisan in 1878. Yet neither was he a professional lobbyist, and he could not submerge completely his political predilections. This fact more than once defeated his efforts as a representative of private interests in the nation’s capital.

In December, the Santa Fe was chiefly interested in securing financial aid for its extension. One means was through an additional land grant.⁶⁴ This it hoped to obtain by an amendment attached to some other railroad bill that seemed likely to pass.⁶⁵ In this it was unsuccessful. Here again a major reason appears to have been lack of agreement on the best mode of procedure between principal and agent.⁶⁶

Another means by which the railroad hoped to get aid in the building of its extension was through securing payment of a sum of money that had been withheld by law from the railroads for transportation of government supplies. The Santa Fe was litigating its case in the court of claims when Senator Plumb introduced a resolution providing for the payment of fifty per cent “of the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, April 16, 1878.

⁶⁴ The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe’s original land subsidy had been granted February 9, 1864—Henry V. Poor, *Manual of the Railroads of the United States*, 1881, 727.

⁶⁵ Nickerson to Morton, December 10, 1878.

⁶⁶ Cf. Morton-Nickerson correspondence, December 1878—Morton Collection.

amount required by law to be withheld from certain railroad companies for transportation service rendered for the Government.”⁶⁷

The Senator had sent the resolution to Nickerson with the thought that it would aid the railroad in securing payment of its claim. The railroad, however, was dissatisfied with fifty per cent and had the resolution redrawn to read sixty-six and two-thirds per cent of the original claim. Otherwise, they did not want it passed as they felt it would probably do more harm than good.⁶⁸ Senator Plumb, however, was completely cold to the new suggestion, making the railroad feel that its chances of success along this line were most uncertain. Yet, they thought it of vital importance to get the revised resolution through if possible, granting them sixty-six and two-thirds per cent, as that would be much better than continuing the slow action of the court of claims, and then having to get an appropriation after that.⁶⁹ In order to facilitate matters President Nickerson put two checks, one for five and the other for fifteen thousand dollars, at Morton's disposal.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Senator Plumb appears to have agreed to the revised resolution.⁷¹ They seemed destined to fail, however, for on the very day that Nickerson sent Morton the money he received a wire from Plumb saying that the Attorney General had gone before the conference committee considering the bill and had succeeded in having the paragraph amended so that only fifty per cent of the allowance was to be paid.⁷² This action, Nickerson felt, made the amendment of no value whatsoever as they would never be satisfied with fifty per cent, and he urged Morton to withhold the money he had sent him until he received further instructions; for, he remarked, “The only ground for consent to contribute to the political expenses of our friends was that we might have the discount *fixed at 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ %*. . . .”⁷³

Morton was disgusted with the whole matter and was preparing to leave Washington when he received Nickerson's letter. He replied to it by returning the draft for fifteen thousand dollars. He

⁶⁷ *Congressional Record*, VIII:531.

⁶⁸ Nickerson to Morton, January 23, 1879.

⁶⁹ Alden Speare, Boston, to Morton, February 12, 13, 1879.

⁷⁰ Nickerson to Morton, March 3, 1879.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1879.

⁷² Nickerson to Morton, March 3, 1879—second letter.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1879.

wrote that the demand had been made on him, "that the parties should be paid, *also* less (16) sixteen per cent," that being the percentage of difference in what the railroad hoped to receive and what it actually had got, but he had refused positively. He retained the five thousand dollars: "Out of that some outsiders, had, perhaps, better be paid, for services. The whole thing would have been killed off except for the patriotic prospect of plunder. But I shall pay nobody, nor cash the draft, except at your direction. There may be a moral obligation on us to pay if moral obligation can exist in such transactions." ⁷⁴

Morton left Washington March 6, and returned home after a short visit in New York.

The Santa Fe was pushing steadily into the Southwest, regardless of legislative aid or the lack of it. Shortly after his return to Nebraska, Morton wrote Strong inquiring about the possibilities of the railroad's employing him to go along with a mining engineer "to pick up property, of mineral sort, here and there for the company."⁷⁵

After some delay, and a trip to Topeka, arrangements were made for Morton to take the trip; and during the months of June and July, he once again experienced the trials of a pioneer. He believed with boundless optimism that the mineral properties of New Mexico, which he would purchase from the "greasers" and which would be tapped by the Santa Fe, would make all connected with them wealthy. He wrote to a friend in New York: "There will be much money made in the mines. . . . Have no doubt but that Leadville will be more than duplicated in richness. My absolute knowledge of *where* the road is to be constructed will give me advantage over the ordinary buyer."⁷⁶

Though a man with four stalwart sons, and approaching his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, Morton seems to have had as much hope and as much enthusiasm as in 1854, when as a boy of twenty-two, he had first brought his bride into the West.

⁷⁴ Morton to Nickerson, March 6, 1879.

⁷⁵ Morton to Strong, April 17, 1897.

⁷⁶ Morton to John McGinnis, June 6, 1879.

It was in this youthful spirit of hope and enthusiasm that he returned home to celebrate his silver wedding. It probably was the result, in part, of prospective success in the mining venture, but largely of the fact that his quarter-century of wedded life had brought him a home fulfilling in a large measure his best hopes and aspirations.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ARBOR LODGE—A SILVER ANNIVERSARY

WHEN CAROLINE AND STERLING MORTON prepared to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1879, they could look back not only on a quarter-century of married life, but on a residence of all but a few months of that time on the farm just west of Nebraska City. In a very real sense, their silver wedding was in celebration of their marriage to their home as well as to each other.

There had been times, since 1855, when one or both of them longed to live elsewhere. During the Civil War, Morton, discouraged by the course of events, had thought seriously of abandoning his Nebraska home for a new one.¹ Since then, he had occasionally entertained similar ideas. In 1870 and 1871 they are evident in letters from Dr. Miller attempting to dissuade him from such action.

"This is not the time for you to leave Nebraska City," he wrote in May 1870. "If you are to leave ever, which, from my heart, do not think it will prove well for you to do. . . . Your leaving Nebraska City at middle age with that family is a fearful undertaking, and I must, after disinterested thought, serious thought, over the whole matter, warn you of the possible consequences. . . . I believe, or rather, fear, that such a change might prove disastrous . . . and that beautiful home, reared by your own hand, the birth-place of your children and of your holier ambitions, and the nursery of all your

¹ See p. 131.

best affections, if you ever part with it, no matter under what skies your lot may be cast, you will mourn and sigh for it the remainder of your days.”²

Then, a few weeks later, in a vein perhaps more befitting a frontier newspaperman: “Why in hell don’t you come up. . . . I hope, by this time, you have become healthfully disgusted with your nonsense about quitting Nebraska. . . .”³

The thought occurred again and again, however; and once, in 1875, it appeared about to lead to action.

For some months, Wilbur F. Storey, because of failing health, had been anxious to sell a part interest in the *Chicago Times* to someone who could assume a share of the editorial responsibility; and, ever since he first entertained the idea, had thought of Morton, whom he had known as a turbulent college boy and a reporter on the old *Detroit Free Press*,⁴ and who for several years had been contributing editorials to the *Times*,⁵ as the most likely man for the job.⁶ For months there were rumors in the press concerning Morton’s possible connection with the *Times*, and Morton, during his frequent extended visits in Chicago on railroad business, saw Storey often. On several occasions it appeared as though an agreement might be reached, only to have one of the parties object to the terms. Such an occasion was early in March 1875, following the grasshopper invasion, when the prospect of becoming an editor in Chicago contrasted most favorably with that of the grasshopper-stripped farm in Nebraska. Mrs. Morton was in Chicago, and she, too, seems to have been enthusiastic. Morton wrote to his son Joy, “. . . Do not expend any money on the farm at all. . . . It would gratify me to sell any of it or all of it & never again to see it at all. It dont suit us. We only need a home in a boarding house, a hotel, a hash hospital. . . .”⁷

That such action was ill-advised was evident in the very phrases of the letter advising it; inevitably, in a few days, Joy received a hasty message: “Do not sacrifice anything by selling too soon. Your

² Miller to Morton, May 24, 1870. As a matter of fact only one son was actually born at Nebraska City. But Miller was not writing factually.

³ *Ibid.*, July 11, 1870.

⁴ See pp. 29–30.

⁵ See p. 195.

⁶ Cf. James M. Walker to Morton, April 1, 1874.

⁷ Morton to Joy Morton, March 2, 1875.

Mother is quite homesick. Hotel life is not so agreeable as it was. . . ."

Yet the lure of the *Times* persisted. Morton's despair over the future in grasshopper- and Republican-ridden Nebraska was intensified by the unfavorable decision in the Supreme Court of the United States, of a long, bitterly contested and expensive lawsuit with the State, in which his title to the "Salt Lands," just outside Lincoln, was successfully contested.⁸ He wrote Dr. Miller that the *Times* matter would, he thought, come to a conclusion before long: "Then all I have in Nebraska shall be sold. Then every sympathy, every ambition for the State I will throttle to death, and going out from its limits, endeavor to forget, by immersion in other affairs, the fact that more than twenty good years have been utterly squandered in attempting to help make a great commonwealth out of sod, vigorous climate, air in motion, and an influx of immigration composed principally of fools and knaves. . . ." ⁹

Had he been able to reach an agreement with Storey, it is probable that Morton would have carried out his threat to "throttle to death" all interest in Nebraska. Those two strong-willed individuals, however, never were able to work out a satisfactory program of cooperation and the matter gradually dwindled out of their thinking. This, despite other expressions of determination, was the only occasion upon which Morton came even close to abandoning his home for another; and even his dallying with the thought of editing the *Times* must be looked upon as an aberration, a flaw in the thread of a life woven inextricably around the one hundred and sixty acres of land pre-empted back in 1855.

⁸ *Morton v. Green* (2 Woolworth 441), a suit in ejectment brought by Morton, Charles A. Manners, and Andrew Hopkins against Jesse T. Green and Horace Smith. The defendants were lessees of the State of Nebraska, and were admitted to defend the title of the State in said lands. In the October term 1871, of the District Court of the Second Judicial District, Judge George B. Lake presiding, a verdict had been returned for the defendants. Morton and his colleagues appealed the case to the State Supreme Court, which upheld the lower court, two to one, Justice Crounse delivering the opinion of the court and Justice Lake concurring. Chief Justice Oliver P. Mason dissented. The case was then appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, which upheld the State Court. (21 Wallace 660). Morton had spent much time and money on the case and was greatly disappointed to lose it. He felt, also, that he had been treated unjustly. The case had political repercussions during Morton's campaign for the governorship in 1884.

⁹ Morton to Miller, April 14, 1875.

Pride in a home and love for it was always a primary emotion with Morton. He often expressed it in his public addresses, though never more fully than in the "Centennial Address," delivered July 4, 1876, before his fellow citizens in Otoe County. It was shortly after he had given up any idea of leaving Nebraska. Perhaps he was telling himself that, after all, it was for the best. Speaking of the early pioneers of Nebraska, as only he could, Morton said:

. . . Now . . . there has come to us a sublime faith that there is, first and foremost, in the material and mental and moral development of a country, a necessity for making and *saving*, over and above all other earthly things, a *Home!* This grand old Saxon word, in its primary sense, means, to "make fast"—to hold closely and strongly. And there came to this country no prosperity, no genuine satisfaction, until, appreciating its prolific soil, and grown strong and energetic in its healthful climate, we, as a people, began with all our might to "make fast"—to build homes, and say to ourselves, "This is a good country; I am satisfied to abide here all my life; this is my Home! . . ."

The *home* is the highest distinguishing attribute of civilization; and a love of home is fundamental, primary patriotism. . . .¹⁰

Morton took pride in his home from the beginning, and no expense within range of his purse, nor effort within his power, was too great to be spent on its improvement. In the early years money was not plentiful, and the expenses of his household of four young and very active boys were burdensome indeed; yet on the fly-leaf of his diary for 1866 he could record that since "squatting" upon his land, he had expended in cash more than \$7,000 for improvements. As his income increased, so did the amount expended upon his farm home—sometimes, even, expenditures of this nature got well ahead of income.

Morton's diary, when he was at home, shows a close and careful concern with the activities of his farm and family. Always there is evidence of conscious effort at home building and home improvement. In 1874 he began the practice—continued until his death—of keeping a farm journal, in which not only expenditures and receipts, but also activities, were carefully recorded.

Important, and constantly added improvements, of course, were trees. Trees had been started almost as soon as buildings, and there were plantings every year. In certain years, such as 1858 and 1871, great additions were made to the orchard and grove. In the former

¹⁰ Morton, "Centennial Address," 26-27.

year, the basis of what was to develop into one of the outstanding orchards in a fine fruit-growing region was started with the planting of about four hundred apple trees.¹¹ In the latter, the largest single addition of any one year was made when one thousand apple trees and a hundred pear trees were set out to form the nucleus of a new orchard. Much of the work was done by Morton himself and he records that he was aided by his twelve-year-old son, Mark.¹² Also in 1871, one hundred evergreens, some beech and maples were added to the grove.¹³

Morton enjoyed the labor of planting trees. Whenever possible, he not only supervised, but performed the actual labor required in the setting out of trees.¹⁴

It is not strange that such a man should evolve the idea of setting aside a special day for the planting of trees, and making it a holiday. Indeed, much of the value of Arbor Day, in Morton's mind, related to the improvement it would make in the homes of the state.¹⁵

Regardless of what he was doing, in all his work to build a better home, Morton had the aid and inspiration of the remarkable woman who was his wife. She who had consented to leave her home of comfort and charm and accompany her husband into a land where seed for the first grain had yet to be sown, was as resolute in the many tasks that faced her throughout her life as she had been in the act of departing from family and loved ones.

Caroline was on the farm the day the spot was chosen for the house that was to be erected. Much of the taste displayed in later years in furnishing the house, in laying out the drives and walks, in planting the trees and shrubs and hedges, was hers. Had it not been for her inspiration, the work might never have been done. Indeed, Mark Morton has remarked in speaking of his mother: "Had it not been for her, none of us—including father—would have amounted to much." ¹⁶

¹¹ Morton to the *Nebraska Farmer*, June 24, 1877.

¹² Diary, April 13, 1871.

¹³ *Ibid.*, April 10, May 9, 1871.

¹⁴ In this connection, the following diary notation is of interest: "April 27, 1872 —At home all day. . . . Dug up and re-planted 60 peach trees; placing them on south side of new orchard. Trimmed many trees in Pear orchard, moved clothes line; stuck cottonwood sprouts, 'cuts' rather in ravine of N. E. field N. E. corner of farm. Worked faithfully all day to make a better home."

¹⁵ See pp. 165-166.

¹⁶ Mark Morton in conversation to the author.

Then, too, Caroline Morton bore many burdens of which her husband knew but little. During his long absences, hers was the responsibility of the house, the farm, and the four growing boys. She was not of the complaining type, but occasional entries in the farm journal in her hand attest to the hardships of Western living in the Seventies, even in the most comfortable of homes. The experiences of January 8 and 9, 1875, are illustrative. Her husband was in Chicago. Her three oldest sons were all away. Only little Carl and the hired help remained. Caroline wrote:

January 8—Goodness! What a cold night and day it has been. Joe walked out last night and walked in this morning. It was too cold to take the horse and buggy in. Everything is frozen up, all the ink in the bottles and stands. Thermometer 22 below zero. Plants all right for a wonder. . . .

January 9—Well, we lived through the night, but found everything frozen in the dining room. I brought my plants out and put them in the north part of the room away from the windows but every one was frozen dead. . . . If I live another winter in this country I shall have two or three coal stoves and not fuss with wood every five minutes. . . .

With all her other activity, however, she always found time for the exercise of her avocations—painting, embroidery, and music. Occasionally her husband took these preoccupations somewhat lightly, as when he wrote to his sister, "My existence is entirely artistic now and the smell of oil paint pervades this cottage with a ubiquity which is like that of the atmosphere. . . . If the boys are not inheritors of pictures their venerable Ma will not be blamed for their unpictureosity." ¹⁷

Much of the pride in the home as it existed, and the hope for its future, centered in the four sons.

Morton was a firm believer in the country as the best place in which to rear a family. He expressed this belief publicly on numerous occasions. In his "Centennial Address" he told his friends and neighbors: "Great cities, centres of crowded humanity in tenement houses, are not productive of best minds or best morals, or of homes, nor of patriotism. Each great city added to the list of municipalities in this Union, lends new jeopardies and begets new dangers to the

¹⁷ Morton to Emma Morton, March 23, 1878.

Republic." On the other hand, he felt that all that was "noble and controlling towards good in the great cities" had been "farm-born, farm-raised, and home-educated in the heart."¹⁸

The chief difficulty with rural Nebraska in the Seventies as a place in which to rear children was the limited opportunity for formal education. There were schools, of sorts, in Nebraska City, and the boys attended these from time to time, but Morton never appears to have been very well satisfied with them. Consequently, all of the boys spent some time away from home in educational institutions, usually in Detroit, where they stayed with Morton's mother and attended their Uncle Ira Mayhew's Commercial College.

None of the four sons attended college. In the Seventies there was no time for the young man who would make his way in the world to waste on the classical curricula of the universities. The poets and the scholars furnished no proper model for him. It was the age of the builders, the financiers, the captains of industry—the age of Jay Gould, Daniel Drew, Vanderbilt, Huntington. Young men everywhere were turning from a career in the schools to one in business.

Morton approved his sons' choices. It was his desire, as well as theirs, that they succeed in the business world, and he wrote them long and frequent letters of encouragement and advice. To Paul, who was working for the Burlington, he discoursed on the proper relations between employer and employee:

. . . In exchange for your services the B&M Railroad Company gives you money. After each legitimate exchange of service for money, each party to the exchange should be better off than before it was effected. The railroad company should profit by your services and you by the wages which you receive for them. Stick to the work you have selected. The field is the best one now open, in all the world, to young men of mental merit and honest worth. Ten Thousand Dollar salaries are *looking for men* competent and honest enough to manage railroads. . . .¹⁹

The meticulous manner in which he preserved his own correspondence was reflected in a desire that his sons do likewise. "*Do not carry letters around in your pockets,*" he wrote to Paul. "Possibly some years hence, letters from me, written now, may be of

¹⁸ Morton, "Centennial Address," *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Morton to Paul Morton, September 13, 1874.

service to you, and possibly, they are, therefore, worth saving. Either file them away or *burn them* up at once. Pockets protuberant with dirty letters are indicative of a lack of system and of laziness and procrastination.”²⁰

The same day he admonished Joy: “*Never carry letters in your pockets more than a day.*”

When Joy, influenced by the stories of fabulous wealth in the Black Hills, thought he would like to try his fortune there, his father wrote that it might be a good idea, “*If you go there with a fixed purpose as to how you are to make your wealth. . . .*”²¹

Morton was concerned, always, that his sons appreciate the value of economy. For Paul, who won rapid promotion with the railroad and began soon to earn an extremely large income for his age, he was especially solicitous.

“I am glad that you try to be economical,” he wrote at one time. “A little money &c, in case of sickness, or loss of occupation is a very substantial comfort. . . . This is a selfish world. In it Paul must look after the interests of Paul and Mark must guard the interests of Mark with the utmost judgment, caution and vigilance. Do well, save well and you will prosper and be happy, *provided*, you forever keep out of Debt. Shun that taskmaster as you would the Devil.”²²

At another time, when Paul did not appear to be doing so well as an economizer and had rejected, for want of funds, a proposition put forth by his father to buy some land, Morton castigated him with that vigor which usually was reserved for political opponents:

. . . Out of your last years salary you have saved less than two hundred dollars. When you are thirty at this rate you will have about \$2000 ahead—provided you remain single and do not become more extravagant than you are now.

Out of your last one thousand and 80 dollars you have saved \$165—: it cost you then—in round numbers—\$900 to live last year. You perceive that you increase your expenses to eat up your salary with a good deal of felicity. When you got \$600 you lived on that sum and saved money.

Speaking of your future you say, truthfully, “I am unable to say now or foresee what may come to pass.” But from the fact that you consume all of your earnings—or nearly all of them, as they come in: I should think you must certainly “*foresee*” and absolutely know “*what may come to pass.*” Of course I am solicitous to see you lay the foundations of an accumulation and I am correct in

²⁰ *Ibid.*, January 4, 1877.

²¹ Morton to Joy Morton, January 13, 1877.

²² Morton to Paul Morton, April 18, 1877.

thinking that a *young* man of 20 years who cannot, or *rather does not*, save twenty per cent of a salary which runs over \$1000—will not be likely to grow into an *old* man who will save anything much out of any sort of a salary however liberal it may be. . . .²³

Morton by no means concerned himself solely with his sons' business habits. He was anxious that they attain the attributes of cultivated, educated men. He commented frequently on their progress in writing, and often accompanied requests for information with the hope that he would get the answer in "a well-written letter." He was concerned that each of the boys spend some time each day in study, and wrote frequently of the value of reading. To Paul and Mark, working in Chicago, he wrote: "You each need mental training. You each need reading and reflection. You ought to read and understand the history of your own and other countries and also political economy. You have ample time to—every night—lay up facts in your brains which will always be useful. . . ." ²⁴

To Joy he urged: "Try and make your time for reading *now*, a little more extensive than it has been for the last few months. Too much "society" makes an ass of a man, who otherwise might amount to something in the world; and I have observed many men utterly ruined by too much polite and soft-headed society. . . ." ²⁵

Relating to "society," Morton was solicitous that his sons choose wisely their future mates. A warning to Paul is typical:

. . . Meanwhile do not "fall in love" with some pretty face, or plump gosling in dry goods. Men should oftener select life-partners by judgment and reason than by mere passion or lust which is frequently mistaken, by youngsters, for genuine love. But the latter article has diffused through it an element of esteem and respect which endures long after passion has burned out, in fact, an element which is as immortal as the soul itself.²⁶

Above all, Morton was concerned that his sons develop into men of honor and integrity. Almost every letter contained some word on the necessity of upright conduct in all affairs of life:

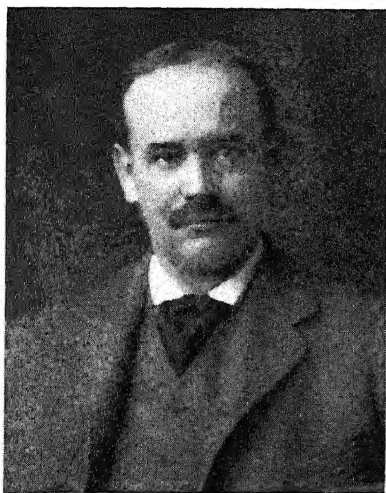
. . . There is a splendid future for each of you or there is its opposite. It depends upon your "staying qualities," your pluck, your persistency and your Honor, whether you fail or achieve success. We all hope, we all feel confident

²³ *Ibid.*, September 7, 1877.

²⁴ Morton to Paul and Mark Morton, January 11, 1877.

²⁵ Morton to Joy Morton, September 19, 1878.

²⁶ Morton to Paul Morton, September 16, 1878.



JOY MORTON
1855-1934



PAUL MORTON
1857-1911



MARK MORTON
1858-



CARL MORTON
1865-1901

J. STERLING MORTON'S FOUR SONS



HIS MOTHER
EMELINE STERLING MORTON



HIS WIFE
CAROLINE JOY FRENCH MORTON



HIS SISTER
EMMA MORTON



HIS COUSIN
MARY FRENCH MORTON

THE FOUR WOMEN OF J. STERLING MORTON'S FAMILY CIRCLE

that you will do Right every day and finally make us all prouder of you than we even now are. . . .

. . . Do not forget that every bad act of yours would make not only yourselves but your parents very miserable, at last, and end finally in a life of failure and shame. . . .²⁷

Morton had little need to worry about his sons, however, and indeed he seldom did. They applied themselves to their jobs with industry and intelligence and it was evident from the beginning of their careers that they would succeed.

The rise of Paul, the second son, was little short of phenomenal. In December 1872, at the age of sixteen, he went to work for the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad at Burlington, Iowa.²⁸ Six months later he was transferred to the freight office at Platts-mouth, Nebraska, and on December 15, 1874, he began work in the freight office of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad in Chicago.²⁹ He was given increasingly heavier responsibility, and in 1878 was appointed Assistant General Freight Agent of the C. B. & Q. Though he was only twenty-one years of age, he had two thousand miles of operating road in his department. He was the youngest man in the country holding such a position.³⁰

Joy, the oldest, had his early career interrupted in the summer of 1874 by a serious illness which threatened to take his life. He had been working in the bank of James Sweet and Company, and was forced to quit. Reflection during his long illness convinced him that opportunities were not very great in any small town bank. After his illness he was employed for a short time in the offices of the Michigan Central Railroad, but he soon found that inside work was too confining and was forced to give it up. He returned home, and for the next three years remained on the farm in an effort to regain his health. During this time he virtually managed the farm, and evidently did it well. He kept the farm journal, and it records faithfully the fidelity with which he executed his trust. He wrote frequently to his father when the latter was away from home, and his letters show not only an understanding of the problems of the farm, but the exercise of much initiative in their solution. In the

²⁷ Morton to Paul and Mark Morton, May 6, June 18, 1877.

²⁸ Morton to Joy Morton, December 21, 1872.

²⁹ Diary, December 15, 1874.

³⁰ Morton to Emma Morton, June 25, 1878.

late summer of 1877, he went to work in the assistant treasurer's office of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Omaha. He was dissatisfied there, however. The wages were low and the position did not appear to offer much chance for advancement. In 1879 he went to Aurora, Illinois, to take a position with the C. B. & Q. as storekeeper. In another year he was to go into the salt company that later was to bear his name.

Mark, the third son, remained in school until 1876, when in October, just before his eighteenth birthday, he went to work for the C. B. & Q. in Chicago, in the same office with his brother Paul. Carl, the youngest, had yet several years at home.

Morton was proud of his sons. In the fly-leaf of his journal for 1878, after listing their occupations, he reflected: "The education and character which, at the earliest age, can render a service of which the world stands in need; and get for the said service, the largest possible price, and upon the price be able to live in comfortable style, is the most desirable education and character which I can imagine. The sons of . . . [ours] seem to approximate that character and that education so far as they have mentally and morally developed. . . ."

On Christmas eve, a few days before, he had written his mother:

Joy, Paul and Mark are at home tonight. "My Castle in Spain" which the deft hands of a boyish fancy built for me, and peopled with my children, many years ago, is all realized now. And while there is music in the parlor and Carrie is waltzing first with Paul and alternately with Mark and Joy, I turn instinctively towards you and wish you too were here to see and enjoy this modest perfection of a satisfied human Home.

Few fathers have been awarded such a quadruple blessing of Boys and no parents ever had less anxiety or shed fewer tears over sons. Each one is truthful, honest, industrious and all of pride-of-good-name; and also inspired with an *Ambition* to reach, in the commercial world, the highest point to which integrity, brains and sterling characteristics generally may rightfully aspire. They will do better than I have, and will establish a family name of which we shall all be proud. I do wish you and Emma were here. . . .³¹

During the Seventies the family adopted a name for the home around which their life centered. They called it "Arbor Lodge." The name first appeared in the farm journal in 1875, and in the same year Morton began to give his address, occasionally, as "Arbor Lodge, near Nebraska City, Otoe County, Nebraska." The next year

³¹ Morton to his mother, December 24, 1877.

Paul presented the family at Christmas with a supply of letterheads with the words "Arbor Lodge" in rustic letters across the top and an engraving of the house in the upper lefthand corner. His father had thanked him thus: "The Arbor Lodge Letterheads are very creditable to your generous heart but not suggestive of a very highly economical head." ³² Even so, one was proudly pasted in the fly-leaf of the farm journal—since the year before called "Arbor Lodge Journal"—and under it was written: "From a photograph of house taken by Dr. Smith of Nebraska City in summer of 1876. Had the Dr. set his camera in the same place twenty-two years before it would have been a picture of barren prairie so far as the eye could see without a tree in sight."

During the summer of 1879, in anticipation of their silver wedding, the Mortons hastened the constant process of improvement at Arbor Lodge. The first step was the planting of a new apple orchard of eleven hundred seventy-five trees.³³ That having been accomplished, work was started toward a complete remodelling of the old house, and Morton wrote his letters and did his work, while at home, "among paper-hangers, carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, and general noise makers." ³⁴

The original house, built in 1855, had been added to room by room as need occurred. When the "new house" was built, the old one was not abandoned, but rebuilt and furnished with additions. As Caroline had helped to select the spot where the original house was to be built, and as she had laid out the drives, the walks and the gardens, so she supervised the remodelling of her modest home into a country mansion. Morton was proud of the work that had been done. As it was nearing completion he wrote his sister: "The house is two stories in front and is finished off in hard wood below; as to doors, casings and floors in such a manner, and with such taste that it is conceded to be the most elegant establishment in the State. . . . The house contains now including halls and closets &c between

³² Morton to Paul Morton, December 31, 1876.

³³ Morton to his mother, April 22, 1879.

³⁴ Morton Letterbooks.

25 and 30 rooms and is 64-42 feet and is paid for and unmortgaged. . . ." ³⁵

The *Nebraska City News*, with justifiable local pride, wrote: "Lighted up by the shimmering glory of a Nebraska sunset, there is no place west of the Hudson river and this side of California that can compare with it. . . ." ³⁶

The anniversary celebration was declared to be "the most prominent social event ever witnessed in Nebraska City," and if the society editor of the local paper was perhaps a bit carried away in her description of the "fair ladies and brave men . . . passing to and fro in blithest converse," she probably was correct. Guests were present from Lincoln, Omaha, and all over the eastern part of the state.³⁷

In addition to the many guests, the family circle was complete, save for Paul, whose duties kept him in Chicago. He had just become engaged to Charlotte Goodrich, and his father, as he prepared to celebrate his own wedding anniversary, wrote him:

. . . Your Mother pronounces your selection a very reasonable and judicious one; and I heartily concur in the opinion of my superior officer.

A good wife can make a happy home. And no man amounts to much until he has married and settled down to building a home. That Lottie will be more economical than Paul is a good thing to contemplate. She will help you along in the world and together you can achieve competence, reputation and happiness. That is all worth having.

I am glad you have acted so wisely and I wish you and yours a long, harmonious, and successful life and your Mother joins me in every aspiration for your welfare with her whole heart.³⁸

And of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of a similar event in his own life, he wrote his mother and his sister, the day after the party, one of those carefree, humorous letters he could write only when discussing his life at Arbor Lodge:

. . . The bride looked as well as any woman could, at her age, after living twenty-five years with such a husband. Her conduct was decorous, although the giddy and spinning manner in which she polkaed and waltzed with a couple of young men and affectionately leaned upon them in the whirls of the dancing might have angered me if those six-foot youths had been other than her own and my own sons, Joy and Mark; who—in steel-pen coats, white chokers and kids with an

³⁵ Morton to Emma Morton, October 6, 1879.

³⁶ November 1, 1879.

³⁷ *Nebraska City News*, November 1, 1879.

³⁸ Morton to Paul Morton, October 23, 1879.

inherited aptitude for dancing—that was transmitted on the maternal side—were quite satisfactory to my paternal eye. The Mother and the sons whirled around and around, laughing and talking, while all the guests admired, and an old fellow, who will sign this letter, sat off in a corner and, very quietly, wiped warm tears of gladness out of his gratified eyes. . . .

Altogether the affair was satisfactory and illustrated the fact that after a quarter of a century in Nebraska we still have friends and still enjoy life. . . .

PART FOUR

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A BEGINNING—AND AN END

DURING THE WINTER OF 1879 AND 1880, Morton was absorbed in his latest business venture—New Mexican silver mining. Life was aglow with the prospect of immediate wealth. Seemingly unaware of Mark Twain's classic definition of a mine as "a hole in the ground, the owner of which is a liar," Morton freely expended his time, energy, and money in the acquisition of mineral property. Much of the time he was in New Mexico busy in the purchase of mining claims. With a group of men from Omaha, including his erstwhile political foe, ex-Senator Phineas W. Hitchcock, he formed the New Mexican Mining Company. He made partially successful efforts to interest wealthy New York and Chicago friends in the silver venture.

After a few short months in which future prospects gleamed brightly, life as a mining speculator proved to be most unpleasant. The members of the New Mexican Mining Company found it difficult to agree on proper measures. Moreover, they did not get on well personally.¹ Morton thought some of the partners "cowards & misers" and "a drag" on the company;² and though he continued for several years to maintain an interest in New Mexican silver, by autumn 1880, he was "in a fret" over his mining matters, and was ready, if favorable opportunity presented itself, to sell his claims.³

¹ This does not apply to Morton and Hitchcock. Their association in the mining speculation appears to have resulted in a close and mutually appreciative friendship.

² Morton to N. K. Fairbank, November 21, 1880.

³ *Ibid.*

The primary significance of the year 1880 in Morton's life, however, is not that he basked in the warmth of New Mexican sunshine and the glow of New Mexican silver; it is that once again he plunged headlong into the icy waters of political life in Nebraska.

Just why he decided to take the plunge in 1880, after twelve years of treading upon the high and dry ground of private life is difficult to determine. It was not for personal gain. He had often expressed the firm belief that he would have been better off financially had he never sought political office or attempted to wield party influence. Moreover, he was not a candidate for office in 1880, but limited his activity to work as chairman of the State Central Committee and member of the National Committee. True, a senator was to be chosen by the legislature in 1881, and a state chairman would not be altogether an unlikely choice. It was most improbable, however, that Democrats would choose the senator, and furthermore Morton evinced little desire to seek a place in the Senate. He still maintained his traditional position that "an unsought office is an honor, but one begged is only a charity from the public."

His action in 1880 probably can be explained in part as a logical outcome of the increasing interest he had taken in political affairs since 1876, and in part as a result of his experience as an attorney and publicist for the railroads. For years he had made a non-partisan attempt as a writer and speaker to convince the people of Nebraska that their interests would best be served by a government which confined itself to an economical minimum of activity, and above all, did not interfere in any way in what he considered to be the sphere of private capital. That attempt had been a failure. A constitution giving the legislature power to regulate railroad rates had been adopted.⁴ The state government had shown an ever-growing tendency to expand its activity and augment its expenses. A marked increase in that tendency had been exhibited in the legislative session of 1879. No regulatory legislation had been passed, but a host of bills to restrict railroads in their transportation charges had been introduced.⁵ Morton simply had come to the conclusion that the only way to make possible the success of his ideas was to take the stump and help elect men pledged to work for them.

⁴ See pp. 210-211.

⁵ Cr. Frank Haigh Dixon, "Railroad Control in Nebraska," 621-622.

The Democratic Party in Nebraska for several years had espoused doctrines to which Morton could not adhere. The fiat money element, in control of the party, had, in turn, spurned any attempt to force his leadership upon them, as in 1878, when they had brusquely turned down the suggestion that he be nominated candidate for Congress.⁶ That the party by 1880 had experienced a change of heart was evident in the Columbus convention of April 1, called to select delegates to the National Convention. Morton received 211 votes out of a possible 257, and more than any other person.⁷ The names of the other men chosen to make up the delegation further testify to the party's changed attitude: Dr. Miller, J. W. Pollock, James E. North, F. A. Harmon, and Richard S. Moloney—with the possible exception of the last, all representatives of the more conservative element of the party.

Dr. Miller wrote that the proceedings of the Columbus convention augured well for the future, and that the time had come for Morton "to be the active leader of the party in our state."⁸ Morton was willing. He had taken an aggressive part in the Otoe County primaries in an effort to send men to Columbus opposed to State Chairman S. H. Calhoun, also from Nebraska City. He had been successful.⁹ Further success at Columbus only inspired him to increased efforts.

The delegation from Nebraska played an inconspicuous part in the proceedings of the National Convention at Cincinnati, but once home, confident in the wisdom of the convention's choices,¹⁰ they went vigorously to work.

On July 1, a huge ratification meeting was held in Omaha. Because no building in the city was large enough to hold the crowd, they met downtown on Fourteenth Street. The Union Pacific band played; anvils were fired, rockets burst in the air, and the sky was "ablaze with fireworks." A bonfire and a locomotive headlight further illuminated the scene. The *Herald* declared the crowd to be "the largest ever seen in Omaha."¹¹ Morton, who had been named

⁶ See pp. 210-211.

⁷ Morton-Watkins, III:195.

⁸ Miller to Morton, April 16, 1880.

⁹ *Omaha Herald*, April 2, 1880.

¹⁰ Dr. Miller had favored Samuel J. Tilden, but quickly acquiesced in the decision of the Convention.

¹¹ *Omaha Herald*, July 2, 1880.

from Nebraska to the National Democratic Executive Committee, was present, and after a few of the local stalwarts such as Judge Wakeley, A. J. Poppleton, John P. Irish, and Dr. Miller had addressed the throng, he was urged to come to the front and give them a speech. It had been more than a decade since Morton had experienced the intoxicating thrill of holding the center of a great political rally. He had matured into a man of forty-seven, and could speak of faces in the audience he first knew "a quarter of a century ago as the pioneers of this vast State."¹² Yet if any of those pioneers were wondering if he had lost the fire and wit of the early days, they were soon to be put at ease. He kept his audience in an uproar of laughter and applause. He had lost none of the vigor of territorial days. He had gained in power and ability. It was an auspicious beginning.

Two weeks later, at a meeting in Lincoln, Morton was unanimously chosen chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee.¹³

Democrats throughout the state were jubilant over the choice. Confidently the Democratic press spoke of success under the new leadership. The *Omaha Herald*, liking to speak with authority, wanted to utter "a word of congratulation upon the fact that the Democrats of our State have a man at the head of the State Committee who has the will and the ability to organize the party in every county and voting precinct. *The Herald*, which is in constant communication with Mr. Morton, feels fully authorized to assure every Democrat in the State that it will not be the fault of the Chairman of the State Central Committee if this is not done. He has already taken off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and entered with characteristic energy upon the work that is before him. . . ." ¹⁴

The new chairman's first public statement was a letter to the *Herald* stating that the committee had "nothing but pluck and zeal to put into this campaign." Furthermore, he wanted it understood that he did not "wish to be bored with letters about *material* aid. This is not a Republican committee. We could not buy votes if we would, and would not if we could." He added a further comparison between the opposing committees:

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ N. W. Smails to Morton, July 15, 1880. Smails was editor of the *Fremont Herald*. He served many years as secretary of the Democratic Central Committee.

¹⁴ *Omaha Herald*, July 28, 1880.

The Republican State Committee for Nebraska got \$20,000 in 1876 to use in this State. They got it then—as they are trying to get it now—by representing our Committee full of money to expend in the purchase of votes. We have no such fund. We want no such fund. . . .¹⁵

Morton had little hope that the state could be won for the national Democratic ticket, and he did not hesitate to make public his opinion. He wrote to the *Herald*: "The Democrats of Nebraska make no boasts. They do not expect to carry this State for Hancock and English. The three electoral votes of Nebraska are not needed for Hancock and English to secure their election any more than a three cent contribution is required for Vanderbilt and Astor to secure them against starvation."¹⁶

All the Democrats were attempting to do was "to take the census of the earnest working friends of the Democratic National Ticket." They wanted to "make a roll call of that game minority" before election day, for after that day, and the certain national victory, "there will be any quantity of patriotic gentlemen, declaring they always were Democrats at heart, and that they earnestly, though quietly, supported Hancock and English."

Meanwhile, Morton attempted to lay a foundation for the state campaign and to direct preconvention Democratic thinking. A story in the *Herald*, under a Nebraska City date line, reported that the campaign would be conducted "by the Democrat Party as plaintiff and the Republican Party as defendant." The charges against the defendant were: "squandering of the public school funds, distribution of the public lands among political favorites, the levy and collection of an enormous annual tax, which . . . has been extravagantly distributed among political favorites. . . ." The voters were especially being called upon to protest against, "the system of subsidizing railroads by county bonds, of loaning public moneys to private bankers, and the absolute rule of monopoly in the Republican party."¹⁷

Taking their cue from Morton, Democratic editors throughout the state hurled frequent and pointed thrusts at what were considered the prime examples of Republican waste and corruption: the penitentiary, the university, and the capitol. W. H. B. Stout, who had

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, August 17, 1880.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, August 22, 1880.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, September 3, 1880.

a labor contract at the penitentiary was always referred to as "Boss" Stout; the university was described as an "educational humbug"; the capitol as "that architectural polypus."¹⁸

In his call for a convention to meet at Hastings, September 29, to nominate a state ticket, Morton stated: "Another and more important object of this convention is to call the attention of taxpayers throughout this commonwealth to the fact that the annual levy and collection of state, county, and municipal tax is a grievous burden, a burden which must be reduced." He urged the delegates from each county to bring with them properly certified statements of the indebtedness of the county and of each precinct and school district in the county, and a statement of the amount of taxes paid by the county for state government. With these figures, it would be possible for "the mismanagement, the extravagance, the jobbery of the republican party in Nebraska . . . [to] be italicised." Every citizen ready to protest against "the further confiscation of his property by political plunderers," the issuance of bonds as subsidies for railroads, and "the waste of time and money which discussions on the prohibitory liquor law in recent legislatures have consumed," was invited to join in sending delegates to the convention.¹⁹

The platform adopted at Hastings was simply a statement, in the form of resolutions, of the issues Morton had raised in his call, with the addition of a plank which affirmed the party's faith in Hancock and English, and pledged "to that ticket and to the solid principles of free trade, or a tariff for revenue only, a sound currency and an honest and economical administration of governmental affairs, their zealous, unflinching and untiring support."²⁰ Here again Morton's hand was very much in evidence.

Placed at the head of the ticket, as the party's candidate for the governorship, was Thomas Wesley Tipton, who, as a Republican, had been one of the first two men to be elected from Nebraska to the Senate.²¹ There was considerable preconvention opposition to Tipton, partly because he had so recently been a Republican, but largely because there was much fear in certain quarters that his strong views in favor of prohibition would cost the ticket many

¹⁸ Cf. Clippings in Morton Scrapbooks.

¹⁹ *Omaha Herald*, September 10, 1880.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, October 17, 1880.

²¹ See p. 144.

votes. Dr. Miller, who held this view, said that he "didn't give a damn" about the state ticket because he thought it impossible to elect it, but he was vitally concerned about the legislative slate, and a weak state ticket would injure the candidates for the legislature.²² Tipton was given the nomination largely as the result of Morton's influence. Morton thought him the best man available.

Tipton appears to have been anxious to make the canvass, despite the fact that his chances of election were most uncertain. Certain of the other nominees did not exhibit the former Senator's enthusiasm, and no sooner had the convention adjourned than Morton was faced with the problem of filling places left vacant by men who refused to run. S. H. Calhoun, whom Morton had succeeded as state chairman, refused to accept the nomination for the position of lieutenant governor. He protested that the demands of private business were too great to permit him to "accept the honor."²³ He was replaced by T. J. Hamilton of Seward, who had written Morton, "You must not put my name on the state ticket for any office."²⁴

The most difficult place to fill was that of congressman. Dr. R. R. Livingston, who had been nominated at Hastings, insisted that his name be withdrawn. His duties as head of the surgical department of the Union Pacific Railroad were such that he could not spare the time for the canvass. "I know I ought to stick," he wrote, "get beaten and then come back to pills & plasters & bear the ills following like a martyr, but my obligation to the Co . . . is such that I cannot. . . ." ²⁵

It seemed that no one was willing to substitute for him. One man to whom Morton wrote replied: "Did the election of Mr. Hancock depend upon my action in the premises I would accept, *but under no other possible circumstances*."²⁶ Others sent similar refusals. Although Morton flaunted the statement "With nobody against Valentine (the Republican nominee) I think it is the most even contest that we could possibly get up," ²⁷ he was worried. With October two-thirds gone and the Democrats still lacking a candidate for

²² Miller to Morton, August 28, 1880.

²³ Calhoun to Morton, October 6, 1880.

²⁴ T. J. Hamilton to Morton, October 8, 1880.

²⁵ R. R. Livingston to Morton, October 4, 1880.

²⁶ W. P. Conner to Morton, October 21, 1880.

²⁷ Cf. Morton Letterbooks.

Congress, Morton wrote Dr. Miller that it seemed almost impossible to find a man "willing to make the sacrifice."²⁸ A few days later, however, the problem was solved by James E. North's acceptance of the place.²⁹ The candidacy of North, a Columbus real estate man, was pleasing to Morton, and he wrote cheerfully to the candidate: "I am very glad that we have so good a name as your own on our ticket for Congressman. It permits me to say that we have in addition to a Solid South now secured a *Solid North*. . . ." ³⁰

The heavy demands of his correspondence prevented Morton from accepting all but a very few of the many requests made for his services as a stump speaker. In lieu of taking the stump, he followed the practice of sending open letters, and proclamations, to the Democratic papers of the state dealing with the issues of the campaign. So frequent did these become that the *Omaha Republican* found occasion to remark that Morton seemed "to imagine himself governor of Nebraska from the number of proclamations he issues." ³¹

Indeed, the main force of the Republican attack appears to have been directed not against Tipton or the other Democratic candidates, but against Chairman Morton. The *Omaha Bee*, edited by Edward Rosewater, who in 1880 was on the verge of deserting the Republicans for the Anti-Monopolists, declared that in view of Morton's early advocacy of bonds for railroads in Otoe County, for him to oppose further bonding was "the height of hypocrisy," and wondered, "who is responsible for Mr. J. Sterling Morton's sudden conversion?" ³² The *Nebraska City Press* discussed him in the same vein, declaring Morton's position in 1880 to be like "Satan Rebuking Sin." ³³

Morton was peculiarly immune to personal attacks. He never bothered to point out that he had opposed injudicious bonding even in the exciting days of the late Sixties. Neither did he bother to point out that, for several years, even while acting in the capacity

²⁸ Morton to Miller, October 19, 1880.

²⁹ North to Morton, October 25, 1880.

³⁰ Morton to North, October 26, 1880.

³¹ *Omaha Republican*, 1880—undated clipping, Morton Scrapbooks.

³² *Omaha Bee*, September 28, 1880.

³³ September 9, 1880.

of an attorney for the Burlington, he had opposed public aid to all corporations, including railroads.

Near the end of the campaign, he took the stump with Thomas Tipton. Tipton was a powerful orator, and the two men worked with vigor in a last-minute attempt to dent the Republican majority they knew was inevitable. Their efforts met with little success. When the votes had been counted the Democrats again had to admit crushing defeat in the state. This did not surprise Morton—any other result in Nebraska would have been surprising.

The election of James A. Garfield to the presidency, however, was a serious blow. Discouraged, Morton wrote to Dr. Miller:

. . . But what can you or I or anybody else do to dam the floodtide of money-power and money-worship in America?

Nothing, absolutely nothing!!

Let the strong centralization Nation begin to live. Let the idiots who have cheered for it, get down into the dust and do it honor! What can stop this tendency to an oligarchy? Nothing.

Let us be satisfied with things that are; and not worry trying to create impossible justice for a mad multitude of lunatics. But let us get more money; let us become more selfish and in comparative luxury and independence let us pass the evening of Life in a serenity entirely undisturbed by patriotism and anxiety for the good of a few millions more or less of idiots. . . .³⁴

The foray into politics had been expensive for Morton. No candidate on the state ticket contributed a cent toward the committee's expenses or was asked to do so.³⁵ An assessment of twenty-five dollars had been levied on each member of the central committee to defray expenses; but only five paid their assessments. In addition to these contributions, and a similar one from an outside source, the entire expenses came out of Morton's own pocket.³⁶ The expenses had been considerable. Postage alone was a serious item, and so heavy was the correspondence that Morton was forced to hire a secretary for several weeks during the height of the campaign, paying his salary from his own pocket and giving him board and room at Arbor Lodge.³⁷ In order to take part in the campaign, he had sold six hundred and fifty shares of C. B. & Q. stock, and—what especially

³⁴ Morton to Miller, November 6, 1880.

³⁵ Morton to Wardell, November 17, 1880.

³⁶ Morton to Miller, November 21, 1880.

³⁷ Cf. Paul Morton to Morton, July 24, 1880.

chagrined him—by election day it had jumped forty-three points above the price it brought on the day he sold it.³⁸

His only consolation, and a slight one, was the thought that, under his chairmanship the Democrats had been able to make a small gain over their showing in the judicial election of 1879. This was consoling because it showed "that among the really radical states Nebraska is *the only one* which shows in 1880 a decrease in Republican majority."³⁹

Morton's prevailing mood, however, was the one expressed in his letter of November 6, to Dr. Miller, quoted above. On the same day he had written in a similar vein to his sister Emma:

... The plutocracy have again walloped the Democracy. The ballots of the people have been corrupted by cash wrung from the people. The masters have been overthrown by their servants—the office holders—and this is now an autocracy.

But I can stand it as well as those who have established it and with them I can struggle for money and all it can bring. The golden calf is the idol of America and I am after my share of the heathen veal, from this day on, while I have health and vigor. Shall go to New Mexico before long. . . .

Morton went to New Mexico in December for another effort to corral a particularly fractious portion of "the heathen veal." He was gone about three weeks, hence he was out of the state during the early January days when a senator was being chosen by the legislature. During the campaign Dr. Miller had expressed the ambition to see Morton in the Senate.⁴⁰ If Morton had cherished such an ambition at all during the campaign—which is doubtful—the results of the election had removed any traces of it from his thinking. With the Republicans in complete control, his only hope regarding the position was that Senator Paddock, for whom he had a "decent regard," would be re-elected. He was fearful, though, that Charles H. Van Wyck, who had come to the state from Orange County, New York, would get the place. Morton had got acquainted with Van Wyck while in Washington in the interests of the railroads, and had come to dislike and mistrust him. He was afraid the Republican Party

³⁸ Morton to Miller, November 24, 1880.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, November 18, 1880.

⁴⁰ Miller to Morton, September 17, 1880—"... I should not be working as I have been working if I did not suppose you had ambition for the Senate. . . . I believe in my heart that the time has come when it is a present possibility for you to go to the Senate. . . ."

was not cognizant of the serious nature of Van Wyck's threat to Paddock's seat. He wrote a letter of warning to P. W. Hitchcock, his associate in the New Mexican Mining Company:

. . . Secretary of State Alexander said here—a day or two since—that Paddock's re-election is already assumed and no combination can defeat him. But they all underestimate Van Wyck as to energy, impudence, money, and desperation. The Orange County contestant will do all things, promise all things, and agree to commit suicide and proceed hellward, the very day his six years of senatorial glory expires if it will help elect him. Remember that you are hereby very earnestly informed that Van Wyck is a hard citizen to beat, and that he goes into this fight fifty thousand dollars strong & determined to achieve success.⁴¹

He had freely expressed the same opinion to other friends, Democratic and Republican. When he returned from New Mexico to learn that his fears had been realized and Van Wyck had been elected, he wrote to Dr. Miller: "You observe that my estimate of Van Wyck was not far out of the way. He out-worked Paddock, Hitchcock, Dundy, Weaver and *both Railroads* or rather *out-generated* the latter. But the patriots who admired carpet-bag Senator Dorsey from Arkansas, carpet-bag Senator Spencer from Alabama *et id omne genus*, can now get a taste of carpetbaggism at home. And I hope they will enjoy and appreciate it fully and completely, though Van Wyck has property interests of magnitude in this state and is, by no means, a carpet-bagger in the impecunious and offensive sense which that term implied down South."⁴²

The elevation of Van Wyck increased Morton's misgiving regarding the value of public life. In one of his frequent letters to Robert W. Furnas, who probably had suffered more than any man in the state from the effects of a political career, he observed: "Every day I find less time to donate the public and less aspiration to meet, cultivate or conciliate that animal. You remember the old game of ten pins. It had but one rule. That rule was 'Every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost.' And the game of life—especially as played in Nebraska—is governed, very generally, by the same beautiful code of ethics. With the exception of his race and color . . . I think Van Wyck an almost perfect representative of your political party. . . ." ⁴³

⁴¹ Morton to Hitchcock, November 17, 1880.

⁴² Morton to Miller, January 23, 1881.

⁴³ Morton to Furnas, February 4, 1881.

Morton did not abjure political life, despite his many fulminations against it; but during the spring and early summer of 1881, events were transpiring which drove all thought of political or any other similar activity completely from his mind.

For some weeks Mrs. Morton had suffered from acute rheumatic pain. By a fall on the third day of July 1880, she had injured her knee. She gave it little attention, and shortly afterwards hurt it again. She began to be troubled increasingly with rheumatism. A trip to Chicago and return, in December, to visit the recently established homes of Joy and Paul,⁴⁴ was made miserable by severe rheumatic attacks. By Christmas, she found it difficult to move about the house, and when in February Morton prepared to make his second trip of the winter to New Mexico to look after the ever-present mining interest, he determined not to go beyond reach of the telegraph.⁴⁵

On March 23, a telegram summoned him home. His wife was seriously ill. For three months she lingered. Months of anxious days and sleepless nights, months in which there was little hope that anything could be accomplished save ease the excruciating pain. Everything possible was done for her. Her local physician was in constant attendance. Doctors came from Omaha and Lincoln. Dr. J. Adams Allen came out from Chicago.

The utter hopelessness of her case found expression in Morton's birthday letter to his mother:

Carrie seemed a little better yesterday but I am afraid the improvement is not real and that the end of her life is not far distant. She has suffered intensely and without complaint until she is very much emaciated and enfeebled.

It is now six weeks since she could be dressed and leave her bed and her failing strength admonishes me that there must soon be a change, a great change, either for better or worse. . . .

Mother I can not write more for I do not know what I may, or can say.⁴⁶

The end came June 29, just at sunrise. Despite the long and painful illness, death struck suddenly. Her husband, Joy and Carl were at home, but Paul and Mark had not arrived. She as well as those

⁴⁴ Joy had been married, September 22, to Miss Carrie Lake, daughter of Judge George B. Lake, Omaha; and Paul, on October 14, to Miss Lottie Goodrich of Chicago.

⁴⁵ Morton to Emma Morton, February 4, 1881.

⁴⁶ Morton to his mother, April 22, 1881.

about her knew the hour had come. Joy said: "Paul and Mark cannot get here. They will never see you in life again. Won't you send them a kiss by me?" She kissed him twice distinctly and perfectly. It was her last conscious act.

The next day she was buried. Every business house in Nebraska City was closed; the streets were silent and empty. A sorrowful crowd thronged the home made beautiful by her hand and taste. Her four stalwart sons, Joy, Paul, Mark, and Carl, carried her forth. With the setting of the sun she was laid to rest in Wyuka, and the grave was strewn with flowers by the hands of her boys.⁴⁷

A home was desolate.

Morton was almost broken with grief. A man who loved his home above all else in life, and whose greatest concern in public affairs was for the homes of the nation, he felt that the life of his own home was ending in darkness. For months it appeared that he would be unable to cast off the pall of mourning. Left alone, he wrote at length each day in his diary, and his every thought seemed to be of his departed wife. Almost every day saw him at the cemetery. Soon after the funeral, he arranged for a monument to be erected at the grave. Every care was taken that it be symbolic of her life and taste. As finally constructed it consisted of a shaft, twenty feet high, in the form of a trunk of a forest tree, riven and broken at the top. At its base lay a sheet of music engraved with "Rock of Ages," needles and other materials of embroidery, the painter's palette, pencils and brushes, graceful ferns and lichens. A vase upon its side contained broken lilies and ivy twining to the top. Upon the opposite side was the cavity of a decayed knot in which were three young birds just from the nest. At the top, the mother looked down upon her brood, with the fourth and youngest under her wing. As a further memorial a short account of her life was written by James M. Woolworth, the distinguished Omaha attorney. It was privately printed and distributed to a few close friends of the family.

Morton always spoke of the four sons as her living memorials. His letters to them in the months just following her death were long,

⁴⁷ Except where otherwise indicated the account of Mrs. Morton's death and funeral is from James M. Woolworth, *In Memoriam, Caroline Joy French Morton* (Chicago, 1881).

full of advice and exhortation to be worthy of the memory of their mother.

A few days after the death of his wife, Morton's friend and associate, ex-Senator Phineas W. Hitchcock, died suddenly. It shocked him greatly. The Senator's last written effort had been a tribute, in the columns of the *Omaha Republican*, to the memory of Caroline. Morton wrote to Paul: ". . . He was a man of tender heart and broad charity and he saw in our Home the devoted wife and Mother and appreciated her great worth and inestimable goodness very fully. He knew her life story and that in 1854 she gave up luxury and ease at home in Detroit and forsook parents and friends to come to a wilderness, among savages, to live with me in a little log cabin and with me to try to build up a Home. . . ." ⁴⁸

He sent a tender letter of sympathy to the Hitchcock boys, Gilbert, who later was to be United States Senator, and John:

. . . You have a challenge. The good name and honor of your father and Mother. Everything you can accomplish in honor, industry, integrity, and good name and mental character is only a testimonial to the character of your parents. . . . ⁴⁹

Gradually, and with great difficulty, he pulled himself out of the depths of his own sorrow; yet during the rest of his days the memory of the wife of his youth, the mother of his sons, was an integral part of his life and thought.

⁴⁸ Morton to Paul Morton, July 11, 1881.

⁴⁹ Morton to Gilbert M. and John C. Hitchcock, July 14, 1881.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TWICE DEFEATED

MORTON'S FIRST TRIP AWAY FROM Nebraska City after the death of his wife was on October 13, when he went to Omaha to preside over the Democratic State Convention. The convention had been called to nominate candidates for positions in the state judiciary and the board of regents of the state university. It was an off year. There was little interest either in candidates or platforms. Morton recorded the trip at some length in the Arbor Lodge Journal, but of the convention said only: "Everything passed off in satisfactory manner to 'Miller & Morton.'" ¹ The burden of the trip's record was a contrast between the Omaha of 1854, first visited with Caroline, and the city of 1881, visited alone.

Even though the convention was relatively unimportant, it had forced Morton to abandon for a day his lonely sorrowing; and from the experience he found that there was "nothing like compulsory duties to keep one up in spirits and in body." ² This observation might well have been an expression of determination, for gradually he began to make for himself increasingly heavier "compulsory duties" which, if they did not overcome his sense of irreparable loss, directed it into productive channels. Most of these duties were political. Notwithstanding his temporary—and characteristic—disgust over his recent foray into politics, he stayed with it and increased the scope of his activity.

¹ Arbor Lodge Journal, October 13, 1881.

² *Ibid.*, October 14, 1881.

Restless and impatient, he could not wait until the regular campaign of 1882 to get into action, but early in the year began to occupy himself with political discussion. In May he wrote General W. S. Rosecrans, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, that it was high time they started to lay the groundwork for an aggressive congressional campaign, and even for the presidential campaign of 1884:

. . . Organization can be energized everywhere, in the West; by a square fight against a protective tariff and in favor of Free Trade. An active forward movement against Dorseyism, Howgatism and Stalwart corruption in the administration of public affairs, generally, will do us, in the Minority States, much good. Democracy must assert something positive in favor of honest money, absolute commercial freedom, and official integrity. Mere negations will win nothing here or elsewhere, and mere policy must give way to principles. When we strive for these instead of votes; there will be a reason and a hope for victory.³

In line with his belief that the party should lose no time in beginning the spread of positive propaganda, Morton decided to invite Professor A. L. Perry of Williams College to come to Nebraska and deliver a series of lectures on free trade.⁴ His project was greeted with very little enthusiasm by other leading Democrats in the state. True, Professor Perry had been well received when he addressed an audience at the State Fair in 1874, and had increased in reputation since that time; but it would cost money to bring him to Nebraska, and it was the general opinion that a discussion of the tariff would be more beneficial in a presidential year than in the off-election.⁵

Morton always integrated national issues with the local ones, and in the Eighties he believed that the doctrines of free trade should be propagated during every campaign and at all times in between. He wrote to various members of the state committee and other leading Democrats urging them to help him finance the Perry lectures, though he usually concluded his letters with the statement that he was "frank enough to say that Perry will come and speak anyway; even though the whole comes out of my pocket. Being the Chairman of the State Dem. Committee in Nebraska tries ones pluck and pocket too, but I will make a fair free trade fight."⁶

³ Morton to W. S. Rosecrans, May 25, 1882. The name of Stephen W. Dorsey, congressman from Arkansas, was connected with the notorious Star Route frauds.

⁴ Morton to Miller, May 26, 1882.

⁵ Cf. Miller to Morton, June 6, 1882.

⁶ Cf. Morton to James E. Boyd, June 7, 1882.

Professor Perry came to Nebraska in August to make six addresses on the tariff question. Aside from transportation furnished free of charge by the railroads, the entire cost of the trip came out of Morton's pocket. In addition, Morton accompanied the Professor on his tour of the state. He had great admiration for Perry, and on the whole seemed well satisfied with the expenditure of the time as well as the money.

In addition to the tariff, Morton thought the Democrats should concentrate their fire upon a prohibitory liquor law. "Anti-prohibition in Nebraska and Free Trade for the world—including the United States—should be our declaration of principles," he wrote to Victor Vifquain, prominent Lincoln Democrat. "On such a declaration—maintaining our party name and organization in every County—we can make some gains even in Nebraska. The prohibitory liquor law should be denounced in resolutions and in speeches everywhere. Free Trade—no restrictions upon commerce—within the limit of the public good should be *the* rallying cry. Write me often. Come and see me."⁷

He wrote to James E. Boyd, Mayor of Omaha and a prominent packer and real estate man, urging him to stir up sentiment against prohibition, and to issue a call for a mass meeting of "liberal minded men of each political party" to crystallize opinion in the state's metropolis against prohibitory legislation. He even included a rough draft of a "call" for such a meeting, should they wish to use it.⁸ Boyd promoted and organized a rather successful anti-prohibition meeting, the first ever held in the state, and reported that in addition he had made it clear to the important liquor dealers of the city, "that there was only one way for them to do and that was if the Democratic Party came out against prohibition the liquor interest must come out openly in favor of that party and against a party that wherever largely in the majority adopted sumptuary laws."⁹

Meanwhile, Morton busied himself with the preparation of a platform to present to the Democratic State Convention scheduled to meet in Omaha, September 14. For advice he turned to Professor

⁷ Morton to Victor Vifquain, July 5, 1882. Vifquain served in the Civil War with distinction, was brevetted a general, and during Cleveland's second Administration, served as United States consul general in Panama.

⁸ Morton to Boyd, July 16, 1882.

⁹ Boyd to Morton, September 4, 1882.

Perry, and evidently the platform was drawn up while the latter was in Nebraska. Possibly it was worked out as the two men journeyed between speeches in the dusty cars, possibly during the quiet day spent at Arbor Lodge before the Professor returned home. In any event, the platform that Morton hoped to have adopted is in Professor Perry's handwriting.¹⁰ Just after Perry left Nebraska, Morton wrote Dr. Miller: "... When the Convention meets I wish to elect a platform—it is ready now and when that is accepted I will step down and out."¹¹

The Morton-Perry platform contained four planks: (1) a declaration for free trade; (2) a protest against "the reckless squandering . . . of that part of the Peoples money which does reach the National Treasury;" (3) a declaration that a prohibitory liquor law was contrary to the fundamental rights of individuals; and (4) a protest against the undue extension of the functions of government, both state and national. The tariff plank expressed Professor Perry's pet theory that a protective tariff was unconstitutional. In the words of the platform: "... the government of the United States has no constitutional or other right to impose taxes on the people, except with the *intent* and *result* of getting money with which 'to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States.' . . ."

This was advanced ground, but Morton held it throughout his long advocacy of a tariff for revenue only.

When the convention met at Boyd's Opera House in Omaha, September 14, Morton, after calling the group to order and supervising the election of General M. Montgomery of Lincoln as chairman, was appointed head of the committee on resolutions—a not disadvantageous position for a man who had a platform he wished to see adopted. The platform submitted by the committee contained Morton's four original resolutions, plus two others dealing with the railroad question.

Dr. Richard S. Moloney, also a member of the committee, had brought before the group a resolution asserting the right of the people to regulate railroad rates, but largely because of the influence of Morton, the committee's resolution said nothing about the regula-

¹⁰ Morton Collection.

¹¹ Morton to Miller, August 16, 1882.

tion of rates. It merely asserted in a general way the right of the people to exercise control over all forms of corporate capital, and denounced attempts by the railroads in Nebraska to influence legislation and elections. A second plank dealing with the railroads demanded the enactment of a law to forbid, under heavy penalties, the issuances of passes or free transportation of any kind to any person holding either an elective or an appointive office in the state government.¹²

The delegates, virtually all of whom had come to Omaha either on passes or greatly reduced fares,¹³ adopted the platform with "great unanimity, . . . applause, and much spirit."¹⁴ During the discussion on the floor of the convention, a seventh plank was added sympathizing with "the Irish agitation in their struggle against English tyranny," and the platform was complete.

Having got his platform adopted, Morton was ready to step down and leave the struggle to his fellow workers. Instead of being allowed to do so, he was hurled into the vortex of the campaign, when, by acclamation, he was nominated for governor. He had not sought the position. When, after the floor had been opened to nominations, he along with J. C. Crawford of West Point and J. F. Warner of Dakota City had been nominated, he immediately had moved that the vote for Mr. Crawford be made unanimous, and Mr. Warner seconded the motion. Morton's motion to make the nomination unanimous prevailed, but after being amended to substitute his name for Crawford's. The delegate who moved the amendment did so because Morton "had plenty of time and pockets of money to devote to the campaign."¹⁵

Called to the front to accept the nomination, Morton made one of those impromptu convention speeches that were to become famous as tonic for the minority:

I think I can truthfully say that this is a surprise. This morning I intended to do what little I could to assist the minority party of this state to make such nominations for governor and other officers as would stimulate the democratic vote of the state to go to the polls. I am not afraid of defeat. If I had been I

¹² *Omaha Herald*, September 15, 1882.

¹³ Cf. Morton to George W. Holdrege, August 26, 1882; Morton to J. W. Morse, August 26, 1882; Holdrege to Morton, September 6, 1882.

¹⁴ *Diary*, September 14, 1882.

¹⁵ *Omaha Herald*, September 15, 1882.

would have left this crowd a good many years ago. (Laughter) While I am not so able as Brother Redick has made it appear to put in time and money in the campaign, I shall do my full part. Of course you do not expect a democratic candidate to have any star-route funds to draw from; (Laughter) but, as it seems to be your pleasure, and as my friend Crawford declines to run, I will undertake to lead this forlorn hope. I give you my word that, while I shall not be able to meet the great statesmen who shall be arrayed on the other side in joint debate, I will endeavor to see them. (Laughter). . .¹⁶

Before the convention adjourned Morton was given full direction of the campaign by being re-elected chairman of the State Central Committee.

No one was under the illusion that the nomination would result in election. Dr. Miller writing in the *Herald* of the "regret to see such a man as Mr. Morton set up to be knocked down as a candidate for governor," said that well-wishers need not be troubled about Mr. Morton: "He is not afraid of defeat." In a more cheerful vein, he reminded his readers in the same editorial: "The prompt acceptance by Mr. Morton of the nomination for governor against his known wish and after he had warmly seconded the nomination of Mr. Crawford, gave him a hold upon the Democrats of this state which, when he gets through with his bold and aggressive fight, will bind them to him as with hooks of steel."¹⁷

The opinion of his sons was expressed in a letter from Paul: "I am glad you had the stamina to accept the nomination although I presume discretion would have pointed the other direction. . . . You are really only put up to be knocked down. It is hoped by your boys that when you drop you do it gracefully. . . ."¹⁸

Morton himself declared: "There is certainly not the remotest danger of an election; but the free and decent discussion of tariff taxes, prohibitory liquor laws and the encroachments of corporate capital upon popular rights may do some good even in Nebraska."¹⁹

The fact that no one held the slightest hope of a Democratic victory did not dim the ardor with which Morton entered the battle.

¹⁶ Unidentified clipping, Morton Scrapbooks. The *Omaha Herald*, September 15, 1882, reports the speech fully, in the third person.

¹⁷ *Omaha Herald*, September 17, 1882.

¹⁸ Paul Morton to Morton, September 18, 1882.

¹⁹ Morton to George W. Doane, September 18, 1882.

Joy offered to furnish his father with a secretary for the duration of the campaign.²⁰ The young man whom he sent out from Chicago not only could take shorthand, but brought with him a machine that was new, and little used in Nebraska—a typewriter. The machine was set up in the library at Arbor Lodge, and the letters flowed forth in such a stream as had never been known before. Rare indeed must have been the Democratic worker who did not receive a letter from the state chairman during that campaign.

Early in the canvass Morton adopted a device he had used so frequently as a territorial politician. He challenged his opponent, James W. Dawes of Crete, to a series of joint debates to discuss "the question of a protective tariff, prohibition of the manufacture and sale of liquors within the state, and such other matters of public policy as may be interesting."²¹ Dawes was rather able, though he was no match for Morton on the stump. There was little hope that he would accept the challenge. Doubtless, it was not issued to be accepted, but merely to provide ammunition for the press. The Democratic editors were not slow to utilize it, and with customary Western forthrightness declared that the Republican candidate's refusal to accept the challenge indicated that he was worthy of such epithets as: "an old-man-afraid-of-Morton," "an ignorant coward," "a stick," and "an ignoramus of the worst kind."²²

Denied the opportunity to debate with Mr. Dawes, Morton prepared an extensive list of speaking engagements of his own. He stumped the state steadily from the first of October until the day before election, speaking almost every day. These speeches were by no means slight efforts. Crowds in those days did not assemble to hear a puny speech of forty-five minutes or an hour. They were satisfied with nothing less than two full hours. They always got the maximum from Morton. His speeches followed a set pattern. After opening with a few remarks regarding the history of the town in which he was speaking—usually recalling an early visit—he plunged into a long discussion of each plank in the platform, winding up, especially in the Irish communities, with the heavy pedal on the seventh plank and "the English tyranny."

²⁰ Joy Morton to Morton, September 15, 1882.

²¹ Morton to J. W. Dawes, September 21, 1882. This Dawes was the uncle of the later vice president, Charles G. Dawes.

²² Morton Scrapbooks.

He devoted much time to the tariff, for he discovered that he was about the only candidate in the state presenting the issue to the people at any great length. He maintained his position that it was important to discuss the tariff even in a state campaign, because the best the Democrats of Nebraska could hope to do in 1882 was to lay a foundation for the national struggle two years hence. The prospects of success encouraged him.²³ He wrote to Professor Perry: "We, of course, cannot expect to overturn all of the rock-bottomed error on the question of protectionism in a single campaign, but I can assure you that we shall have five out and out free traders in the state where we had only one in 1880." ²⁴

Morton neither trimmed nor temporized. Every plank in the platform was discussed fully and fearlessly. His audiences never were left in doubt as to his position on any of the issues of the campaign. His deep-seated opposition to all forms of sumptuary legislation made his denunciation of a prohibitory liquor law especially vehement. His position arrayed a large portion of the clergy, particularly of the Methodist denomination, against him. He labored extensively in order to convince the ministers of the essential righteousness of opposition to prohibition. He answered their open letters in the papers of the state. He wrote long and earnest private letters. He quoted the Bible freely and at great length. All was to little avail. Having come to the conclusion that his clerical opponents would not be converted, he dismissed them in summary fashion. He reported to Dr. Miller that he had begun the practice of saying about them:

There is not a single Prohibitionist in the state of Nebraska who will vote for the Democratic ticket because the platform upon which that ticket stands is squarely, fairly and unmistakably against the whole theory of Prohibitory Legislation. But show me a radical pulpit-hanger of any denomination or sect—one who preaches politics every Sunday mixed with the Puritan doctrine of prohibition and I will show you always, without exception an individual who is voting for Dawes and the Republican ticket throughout.

He admitted that the statement was "rather strong" but added: "still it directs the German mind to an observation of a peculiar type

²³ "My father, L. J. Abbott, who was chairman of the Dodge County Republican Central Committee in 1880, once told me that he was converted to free trade by the Morton speeches of 1882."—N. C. Abbott to the author.

²⁴ Morton to A. L. Perry, October 12, 1882.

of mental and moral man who has carried prohibition into effect in Iowa and Kansas." ²⁵

Morton had not had a discussion of the railroad problem in his original platform, but he had drawn up the plank adopted at the convention, and throughout the campaign reiterated his position on that ticklish question. He admitted that he was not hostile to the railroads when they confined themselves to their legitimate function—that of plying the carrying trade. When they expanded beyond that activity, he was ready to fight them; and he never left his hearers in doubt that in Nebraska they had so expanded. He declared the Republican Party "as thoroughly the property of the railroads as the engines on their tracks," and, "the people of this state had never, since the days of Tipton, elected a senator except Van Wyck. It was always the railroads. Every Republican candidate for office was freely spoken of as the Union Pacific candidate or the Burlington and Missouri candidate; the people had no candidate." ²⁶

In his speeches on the railroad question, Morton did not exhibit a changed opinion regarding the proper relationship between government and corporate wealth. He disapproved of regulatory legislation as heartily as he ever had in the days when writing editorials for the B. & M. Yet his individualism worked both ways, and he was merely giving expression to his long and deep-seated mistrust of the close connection—or supposed close connection—between the dominant corporations and the dominant political party of his state. This position, like many which Morton held, was calculated to make enemies on both sides. The Anti-Monopolists insisted upon regulation. Because he would not support regulation, Morton was referred to, in the organs of Anti-Monopoly, as "the notorious railroad lobbyist who is now nominated for governor," and "that tried bill pusher of the railroads." ²⁷

On the other hand, his fulminations against the political activity of the railroads threatened to cost him the friendship of his former associates. His sons, who were close to the railroad interests, warned him of the possible consequences of his outspoken criticism. Their father, however, does not seem to have been impressed, and con-

²⁵ Morton to Miller, October 11, 1882.

²⁶ *Omaha Herald*, October 3, 1882.

²⁷ Cf. *Omaha Bee*, September 16, 1882.

tinued his cause, hammering at opponents on both the right and left.

Morton battled vigorously right up to the eve of election when he addressed a mass meeting of his fellow townsmen in Nebraska City. The Democratic editors of the state were enthusiastic over his ability. Many of them were new in Nebraska and did not remember his territorial campaigns. In their enthusiasm some of them began to talk of Morton as the Democratic choice for vice president in 1884. The *Omaha Herald* said: ". . . there is a sort of religious revival going on here in our political affairs. . . ." ²⁸

Enthusiasm and prodigious effort, however, were not enough to uproot the well-entrenched Republicans. As Morton had predicted, he was defeated badly. The total Republican vote had been reduced by almost twelve thousand, but this was done not by the Democrats but by the Anti-Monopolists who polled almost seventeen thousand votes where the Greenback candidate in 1880 had not received four thousand. Morton, for all his effort, did not receive five hundred more votes than had Thomas W. Tipton.²⁹ There was some slight personal satisfaction in the returns. On an average, Morton ran about two thousand votes ahead of the rest of the Democratic ticket; and his home county gave him almost twice as many votes as it did the other two candidates.

Democratic candidates for the legislature had been more successful than those on the state ticket. Thirty-five Democrats had been elected to the lawmaking body scheduled to meet in January. It was possible that if these men held together, and secured the cooperation of the Anti-Monopolists, they would be able to elect the senator to succeed Alvin Saunders whose term expired in 1883. The knowledge that Democratic votes might prove decisive imparted an interest in the approaching campaign to a degree that had never prevailed when the contest was merely one between aspirants within the Republican Party.

A considerable portion of Democratic opinion soon came to favor the party's standard bearer in the late campaign as their choice for

²⁸ *Omaha Herald*, October 27, 1882.

²⁹ Official abstract of votes, *Nebraska State Journal*, November 29, 1882; Morton-Watkins, III:197.

the office. That Morton early was aware of this—if indeed, it had not been in his mind during the campaign—is indicated in a letter to his son, Joy, a short time after the election: “. . . Some men say I will be elected U. S. Senator by Dems and anti-monops, but of that I dream not at all. The Democrats will go for me in a body and I have asked no one for a vote, nor shall I ask anyone. . . .”³⁰

Throughout the weeks preceding the convocation of the legislature, Morton remained aloof. His position was well defined in a letter to G. P. Marvin, a *Beatrice* editor and member of the Democratic State Committee:

It would be ungrateful not to acknowledge the receipt of your newspaper of the 24th instant, containing complimentary allusion to myself in connection with the high office of a United States Senator from Nebraska.

The good opinion of my fellow citizens and their approval of my character is worth much more to me than mere office, however high. Therefore—whatever you may hear to the contrary—I shall never beg, buy, or bully any person or party into voting for me; nor seek, in any way, as a self-appointed candidate, the honorable place you have so partially commended me as worthy to occupy.³¹

It was generally conceded that the officers of the two large railroads serving the state, the Union Pacific and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, wielded much influence in the election of senators from Nebraska. The extent of this influence was never demonstrated, nor even its presence absolutely confirmed; yet it probably existed, and in a considerable degree, because all of the politicians in the state acted in senatorial matters with an eye to the two railroads.

To a certain extent, the railroads appear to have been favorable to Morton's candidacy. That favoritism came, strangely enough, not from the Burlington with whom he had worked, but from the Union Pacific. Moreover, even the Union Pacific was not unreservedly in favor of him, and any expression of their interest appears to have been confined to the weeks preceding the meeting of the legislature. Morton's good friend, E. B. Chandler of Omaha, a man close to the officials of the Union Pacific, reported a conversation with S. H. H. Clark, operating superintendent:

³⁰ Morton to Joy Morton, November 19, 1882.

³¹ Morton to Marvin, November 27, 1882.

. . . I mentioned local politics in which you might be interested at the convening of the Legislature & he (Mr. Clark) assured me he and "their people" would prefer you to any other person in the State for Senator. He agreed with me fully that the next administration would probably be Dem & therefore a Dem senator would be able to help them more than a Repub of equal ability (provided they had such to elect which he admitted they had not). I think however that quite early in the campaign before present results were dreamed of he gave Jo Millard encouragement of assistance which perhaps he may feel bound to carry out. But it is his opinion that he cannot get elected (tho stronger than any other Republican) & that your chance is better than any other man spoken of. He deems it a nice thing to make their influence felt for good to any candidate tho there will be several members there whom they control. I am sorry he is going away before the Legislature meets for he would help you more than any man he is likely to leave this matter in charge of. . . .³²

Morton never let his hopes of getting the election, or even railroad support for the position, rise too high. On the eve of the legislative session, he wrote Henry C. Lett, a pioneer political and personal friend who had moved out of the state: "The Legislature meets tomorrow, but I shall not attend nor hang around that honorable body of lawgivers. Neither shall I beg votes, or attempt to buy votes; and there is, therefore, no danger of my being elected U. S. Senator as some good and enthusiastic friends kindly predict."³³

A letter to Paul displayed his lack of confidence in any rumors of railroad support for his candidacy:

. . . The Senatorship . . . I could get except for the U. P. being for Millard and the B&M against me. The two roads can elect me. The one cannot elect Millard and the B&M can only get in an enemy. . . . These railroads will learn when it is too late that stalwart and stealing lawyers, to make capital for themselves, are liable to ruin railroads.³⁴

Though Morton had studiously avoided any appearance of candidacy, and though he had decided to remain away from Lincoln, he began, as the contest approached, and his friends kept insisting that his chances of election were good, to take steps to further his position. He wrote Dr. Miller wondering if it would not be a good policy to call Democratic attention to the date upon which balloting for senator would begin, "then ask, *possibly*, that men of character and substance—taxpayers who believe in Free Trade—Democrats

³² Chandler to Morton, December 15, 1882.

³³ Morton to H. C. Lett, January 1, 1883.

³⁴ Morton to Paul Morton, January 5, 1883.

from each county send down representatives to advise and counsel with the Democratic members of the Legislature." He also felt that if there were any chance of Democratic success, a nomination in caucus must be made and adhered to faithfully.³⁵

Miller answered that he had it "on responsible authority" that Morton would be nominated in the Democratic caucus, and that while the Democrats in the legislature were not yet united, Morton's chances of election would be greatly increased if he would "go upon the ground in person, take personal possession of a majority of the caucus, and hold it if possible."³⁶

Morton replied:

. . . Should the nomination come to me I will proceed to Lincoln and accept it on the understanding that it is in earnest, permanent and for a fight instead of a Dress parade. When nominated for Governor nobody asked me to run a little while and then withdraw for A. B. C. & D. to respectively run. But I was expected to continue the race, to make my own canvass, pay my own expenses and see that no time was wasted by myself on my own affairs for six weeks. And I did as I was expected to do in that matter so that *now* if I ever get before the Democratic caucus after it shall have tendered me its nomination I will have its members do by me as I did by the party, stick by steadfastly until the election is over and the votes counted.

Except upon condition of *adherence* to the end I will not accept the nomination if it is tendered to me. It is better to meet honorable defeat than to achieve dishonest victory. We agree. For your more than fraternal fidelity, I am afraid I shall never be able either in deeds or words to make any suitable acknowledgment. . . .³⁷

Despite his earlier determination, Morton could not wait until receiving the nomination of the Democratic caucus to go to Lincoln, but went there on January 16, on the afternoon train.³⁸ The first senatorial ballot had been taken during the morning, and though nothing decisive had been shown, Morton's seventeen votes in the legislative joint session was a larger number than was received by any other candidate of either party.³⁹ The names of thirty-three men had appeared on the first ballot. As the *Omaha Bee* remarked,

³⁵ Morton to Miller, January 6, 1883.

³⁶ Miller to Morton, January 8, 1883.

³⁷ Morton to Miller, January 10, 1883.

³⁸ *Omaha Herald*, January 18, 1883.

³⁹ *Nebraska House Journal*, 1883, 247.

"Nebraska has no need of a legislative act for the encouragement of senatorial timber culture."⁴⁰

The Democrats had held a meeting on the evening of January 15, at which they had decided to scatter their votes on the first ballot (which they did), and then meet in caucus to unite solidly upon one man. That man, it generally was assumed, would be Morton.⁴¹ The caucus of the sixteenth, however, did not produce the looked-for agreement. Instead of nominating a candidate, the Democrats agreed to continue the practice of scattering their votes. The person responsible for this action, which Dr. Miller held to be "the primary mistake of the Democrats,"⁴² appears to have been Joseph Hollman of Dakota County. A strong man in the party, he had been the choice of the Democrats of the legislature for the position of Speaker of the House. He refused to caucus, because he declared that to do so would be to follow the dictates of Dr. Miller and the *Herald*. Dr. Miller had tried to read him out of the party because of a personal difference a few years prior to this time, and General Hollman now refused to cooperate with him in any way.

Another difficulty in the way of Democratic agreement to unite on Morton was the presence of Mayor Boyd of Omaha in the capital city. He had arrived on the same day as Morton, and had brought a large number of friends with him. His arrival created "quite a flurry" among those observing the proceedings.⁴³ At the beginning of the campaign, Boyd, in deference to Morton, had been content to occupy the position of "reserve" candidate.⁴⁴ Immediately upon his arrival in Lincoln, however, he began to make a vigorous effort to get as many Democratic votes as possible, and also "to corral the Anti-Monopolists."⁴⁵ Boyd found no favor with this latter group, but neither were they enamored of Morton. They believed him to be "a railroad man with passes in his pockets."⁴⁶

As far as Morton was concerned, the contest was getting out of hand. Essentially, a campaign for the Senate presented a type of political problem which he was ill-adapted to resolve. It was not a

⁴⁰ *Omaha Bee*, January 17, 1883.

⁴¹ *Omaha Herald*, January 16, 1883.

⁴² *Ibid.*, January 19, 1883.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1883.

⁴⁴ *Chicago Times*, January 10, 1883.

⁴⁵ *Omaha Herald*, January 18, 1883.

⁴⁶ *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, January 25, 1883.

matter of convincing the public. The vigorous stump speech, full of wit, sarcasm, and high-flown oratory, the straight-out fight on definite issues and broad principles of government had no place in the senatorial campaign. It was largely a campaign based on hotel-room strategy—an art Morton never mastered. Occasionally, he tried to master it, but always sickened of the attempt before achieving anything like success.

The atmosphere of the capital city during the senatorial contest of 1883 was oppressive with intrigue. Leading aspirants were ensconced in hotel suites at twenty dollars a day. The board bills of the hangers-on—paid by the candidates—ran to \$500 a day. Hotels and saloons reeked with the smoke of free cigars strewn with a lavish hand by the generous candidates. It seemed that each train brought a fresh pack of politicians, big and little, all wanting to have some part in the manufacture of a senator. The hotels were filled to overflowing. The run-off, if important enough, spilled into the twenty-dollar suites; if unimportant, into the lobbies. One reporter declared that the lobby of the old Commercial Hotel usually was so full that if you wanted to invite a man to have a drink, you did it in a whisper else your invitation would get a dozen takers instead of one.⁴⁷

The legislators were not unaware of the interested persons in their midst. Before one ballot, both houses took a recess for an hour, "in order that an opportunity might be given the members to confer with their constituents."⁴⁸ So busy were the lawmakers consulting with their constituents and cogitating upon the problem of the United States Senate that during the first fifteen days of the session they were able to pass but two bills—one making an appropriation for their pay, and another for their expenses.⁴⁹

For a few ballots, Morton maintained his position as the leading candidate. The Democrats, however, showed no disposition to abandon the practice of scattering their votes. Moreover, it became evident that Mayor Boyd, having got the influential Douglas County delegation in his train, stood in a fair way to gain much of Morton's early advantage. Clearly Morton, if his action was to be consistent

⁴⁷ *Omaha Herald*, January 3, 1883, and February 1, 1883.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1883.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, January 20, 1883.

with his views on political integrity, would be unable to achieve a victory. Disgusted, he left Lincoln on January 19, as one paper put it, "swearing vengeance on Douglas County."⁵⁰ The prize was not worth the price.

He explained his action to Robert W. Furnas, the old friend who often had expressed surprise that Morton had re-entered political life: "... Yes I did 'sicken' at Lincoln and return because it became a mere gymnasium for the exhibition of athletic pocket-books and bank accounts. . . . The demands of dollars in corporate shape, to take part in and control the election are not more presumptive and insolent than the assumption and above-par egoism of those vulgar-minded persons who think their cash superior to all other men's qualities either of mental or moral character. The dollar in politics is the cancer which is eating out individual honor and national regard for decency. . . ." ⁵¹

Having dropped out of the race for the Senate, Morton was concerned that the men from Omaha, on whom he blamed his defeat, be not allowed to capitalize on their action. He wrote to H. L. Tower, one of the active Democrats of the legislature and the only member of the House who stood by him on every ballot, urging him to do all in his power to prevent the nomination by a Democratic caucus of any candidate from Omaha: "This is asked, not because I dislike Omaha, her people or her candidates, but because a majority should never, in our party, allow itself to become the servant of a factious and dogmatic minority. All the chance there ever was for the election of a Democrat to the United States Senate from this State, at this session of the Legislature, was bottomed on the unification of the votes of our party. And now—that chance being lost—it seems political equity that, those who 'put off' the time of solidification . . . should get its fruits in continued punishment by the party."

He expressed again his utter disgust with the part played by money in the election of a senator from Nebraska:

. . . Whenever the contest for the position of a United States Senator becomes a tournament of pocket books and a sort of royal exposition of bank accounts, it is quite time for gentlemen who prize personal poverty, combined with integ-

⁵⁰ *Omaha Republican*, January 20, 1883.

⁵¹ Morton to Furnas, January 24, 1883.

city and self respect, to stand back from the course and witness the wonderful acrobatic feats which a really athletic bank cheque can inspire. . . .⁵²

The contest at Lincoln dragged on. The Democrats and Anti-Monopolists were hopelessly split. The Democrats swung heavily to Mayor Boyd, but he was more objectionable to the Anti-Monopolists than Morton would have been. It was evident that the Republicans again would elect the senator. Even they had difficulty in coming to an agreement, their votes being scattered among Alvin Saunders, the incumbent, Joseph Millard, John M. Thayer, and a number of lesser lights. Finally, seemingly out of exhaustion, on the last day of January the dominant party united on General Charles Manderson, who prior to the ballot on which he was elected had never received more than ten votes.⁵³

The Democrats had met defeat because of their inability to unite on one candidate. Latent in this inability was a conflict of men and measures which threatened to disrupt the entire organization of the party, and to throw into animosity men who, with rare exceptions, had been bosom political comrades since the days of territorial organization. The portents are evident in a letter from Morton to Dr. Miller, written in answer to a request that he (Morton) throw his strength to Mayor Boyd in a last-ditch effort to achieve Democratic unity. In that letter Morton unequivocally refused to comply with the Doctor's request.

⁵² Morton to H. L. Tower, January 21, 1883.

⁵³ Cf. *Nebraska House Journal*, 1883, 246-478.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A FIGHT FOR FREE TRADE

MORTON'S VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN against a protective tariff during the state contest of 1882 was only the beginning of a struggle that was to increase in both intensity and scope. In Morton's thinking, the tariff had become the paramount issue of American politics. With characteristic vigor and singleness of purpose, he forced that issue wherever possible. His part in the agitation that led finally to the establishment of the tariff as a national political issue cannot be overlooked.

In the weeks following the senatorial contest of 1883 Morton spent much time in Chicago, visiting at the homes of his sons, and trying to better his position as an owner of New Mexican silver mines. This vexatious question continued to demand both his time and his money. It even necessitated another trip to the Southwest, ameliorated, however, by the fact that it was taken in a special car, in company with N. K. Fairbank, Martin Ryerson, Franklin McVeagh, and Marshall Field.¹ Prospecting such as the Forty-niners never enjoyed!

Nevertheless, Morton soon returned to a consideration of the tariff, and devoted most of his time to its discussion. As had been the case with all questions that had touched him deeply, he connected the tariff with virtually all aspects of life. Arriving from Chicago on Arbor Day, he found an invitation to address the students of the University of Nebraska at their tree-planting celebration. It

¹ Arbor Lodge Journal, February 16, 1883.

was too late to comply with the request, but from a perusal of his letter of regret, we can well imagine what the students might have heard. After expressing himself as "much pleased with the growing popularity of the anniversary," and finding it "particularly agreeable to know that among the youth of the land who are entering the higher walks of learning . . . the celebration of Arbor Day, by actual tree planting, is becoming a standard custom," the founder of Arbor Day wrote:

. . . Under a tariff for protection the United States is paying a bounty of at least two dollars a thousand feet on lumber made from our own forests. In other words, a tax is imposed on imported lumber of two dollars a thousand feet, not to get a revenue into the public treasury, but to give an artificial value to home-made lumber, and to shut out competition from Canadian forests.

In fact, government, under the disguise of a tariff for protecting home industry, is actually paying a bounty for the speedy destruction of the forests of the United States. Constant tree planting is therefore the price of forests in the future as much as "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."²

In the spring of 1883 Morton wrote a series of articles for the *Omaha Herald*, urging the necessity of tariff reform. He took no middle ground, but advocated squarely the principles of free trade. Dr. Miller published the articles, but admitted that he did not completely endorse them. Under the influence of the Ohio and Pennsylvania Democrats, he was beginning to veer away from an extremist position on the party's traditional plank. Morton argued in vain with his old friend that for Democrats to espouse any doctrine other than free trade would lead to compromise and subterfuge, and, in the end, complete capitulation to the protectionists.

"Though defeat be made certain, by a bold and vigorous campaign for Free Trade; and victory insured, beyond doubt, by a defense of protection," he wrote, "still I am for Free Trade and honorable defeat, in its advocacy, rather than victory by subterfuge. We must take care of a great principle. Let Randall³ and all the 'old-men-afraid-of-their-constituents' take care of themselves. We need say nothing for or against them. But the principle of Free Trade we must maintain."⁴

² Morton to H. E. Hitchcock, Acting Chancellor of the University of Nebraska, April 18, 1883.

³ Samuel J. Randall, a Democratic representative from Pennsylvania.

⁴ Morton to Miller, May 1, 1883.

Morton's articles in the *Herald* stirred up considerable interest in the opposition press, but did not provoke much discussion of the tariff *per se*. The *Omaha Republican*, which may be taken as illustrative, replied to the articles by recalling Morton's opposition to the Civil War, and declaring that he was opposed to the protective tariff because it had helped the Union cause in the conflict.⁵ A reply in the form of a personal attack might have been disconcerting to a man who was advocating a principle, but it bothered Morton not in the least. He was used to that sort of attack. Moreover, it helped to convince him of the righteousness of his cause, and the unanswerable nature of his arguments.

Morton was asked to speak at a free trade convention during the first week in June in his home town of Detroit.⁶ It was not a local meeting, as early free trade convocations had been, but was national in scope; according to its sponsors, it was the first meeting of its kind ever held in the United States.⁷ The men who were to address the convention formed a distinguished coterie of important advocates of tariff reform. In addition to Morton, there were: David Ames Wells of Connecticut, probably the country's foremost advocate of free trade; Thomas Shearman of New York; Frank Hurd of Ohio; Professor William Graham Sumner of Yale; and Professor A. L. Perry, Morton's old friend and counsellor from Williams College.

Most of the leaders in the convention were from the Eastern states. Morton, with the possible exception of Henry J. Phillpott, editor of the *Des Moines Leader*, was the only important Western exponent of free trade in attendance. From the beginning, he assumed a position of leadership in the convention, and it is probable that the Detroit Free Trade Convention did more than had any prior event to develop for him a national reputation. He made an immediate and favorable impression on both the press and the delegates. Probably one factor which worked in his favor, especially with the Easterners, was his alarming dissimilarity to the common notion

⁵ May 9, 1883.

⁶ William G. Brownlee to Morton, May 16, 1883.

⁷ *Detroit Evening News*, May 31, 1883.

of how a Westerner should look and act. As one reporter described him, with his tanned skin, iron-gray moustache, and blue flannel suit he looked "like an army officer off duty, rather than a tiller of the soil."⁸

The tiller of the soil who looked not at all like a farmer was chosen as temporary chairman of the convention. When, in this capacity, he was queried as to the object of the meeting, he replied that it was "to notify the republican and democratic parties that unless one or both move toward commercial freedom, with an unequivocal declaration in favor of a tariff for revenue only, that we shall organize a National Free Trade party. . . ."⁹

In predicting a free trade party Morton was in advance of his colleagues, but the proceedings of the convention sustained his prophecy that the Detroit meeting would develop plans for an aggressive campaign of tariff reform along radical lines. That this was done appears largely to have been due to the influence of the men from the Northwest who already had developed active free trade organizations within their particular states. The two most encouraging reports of work already done were made by Henry J. Phillpott and Morton. Phillpott told of the organization of the Iowa Free Trade League and of its constant growth. Morton reported his success in convincing the Democratic Party of Nebraska to incorporate a free trade plank in its platform.¹⁰

The Western men made their influence felt by overthrowing completely the resolutions as reported by the committee appointed to draft them. This committee, dominated by delegates from the Eastern states, reported a resolution that had been brought to the convention by the delegation from Brooklyn, which declared for the complete removal of all duties on raw material but only a reduction of those on manufactured articles. This had brought immediate protest from the West. As Morton said later: "We western men could not see this fine distinction."¹¹

Andrew J. Williams of Ohio seems to have been the most active of those who objected to the resolution. He summarized his position as follows: "I will say the policy of this conference and the

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 1883.

¹¹ *Chicago Tribune*, [June 5?] 1883.

whole theory upon which we are acting here, as I apprehend, is that we are in favor of the proposition enunciated by my friend from Nebraska, in favor of the constitutional doctrine of taxation for a specific purpose, that is, for revenue."¹² He moved that the tariff plank of the Nebraska Democratic platform of 1882 be substituted for the committee's resolution.

The Nebraska plank was not one upon which compromisers or even moderates could stand. It would support free traders only. There was considerable discussion, with many of the men expressing the view that the adoption of the Nebraska plank would seriously injure their prospects of success in the East. Nevertheless, the radicals prevailed, and the motion was carried by a comfortable majority. The convention went on record as believing that:

. . . the Government of the United States has no constitutional or other right to impose taxes upon the people except with the intent and result of getting money into the National Treasury with which to pay the public debt, provide for the common defense, and promote the general welfare, and all tariff taxes called protective, laid with different intent and result, ought to be abolished.¹³

It was an important victory for Morton. His views had been approved by some of the most distinguished men of the day. It would furnish an argument to silence the croakers in the Democratic Party in Nebraska who wanted to abandon tariff reform as a forlorn hope.

As a result of the Detroit meeting, the American Free Trade League was reorganized and placed upon a more effective basis. A national committee, composed of one delegate from each state, was provided for, and an executive secretary with headquarters in New York. The conference recommended that all who were interested in tariff reform work through the American Free Trade League. Following the recommendations of the conference, the American Free Trade League met in Detroit and proceeded to effect the desired reorganization. The group elected as its president for the ensuing year David Ames Wells of Connecticut, staunch free trader for many years, and active in the American Free Trade League since its organization in 1869.¹⁴ Chosen vice presidents were: Thomas Hol-

¹² *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 1883.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf. Fred Bunyan Joyner, *David Ames Wells, Champion of Free Trade* (Cedar Rapids, 1939), 117.

land and Anson Phelps Stokes of New York, William P. Wells of Michigan, William P. Fishback of Indiana, John S. Phelps of Missouri, B. F. Gree of Iowa, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. of Massachusetts, B. R. Forman of Louisiana, Charles P. Smith of Pennsylvania, James H. Canfield of Kansas, and J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska. R. R. Bowker of New York was chosen executive secretary, and Henry J. Phillpott of Iowa, western secretary. George F. Peabody of New York was elected treasurer.¹⁵

Morton was jubilant over the work of the convention. Enroute to Nebraska City, he told reporters in Chicago that he had no doubt an effective national organization of free trade opinion would result from the Detroit meeting, "whether the old parties like it or not."¹⁶ On his way home from Chicago, he stopped over in Des Moines to attend the Iowa State Democratic Convention. Called to the platform, he addressed his Iowa brethren on the evils of the protective tariff, and urged them to adopt a declaration in favor of free trade. The members of the convention did not share Morton's views completely, and a motion was made by a delegate from Scott County, after a long speech, that the convention refuse to endorse Morton's free trade sentiments. The platform as adopted did not endorse Morton's views entirely, for to have done that would have been to adopt the Nebraska platform, but it did contain a plank which stated that the Democrats of Iowa favored "a tariff for revenue only by gradual but persistent reduction of protective duties."¹⁷ It was a long step in the right direction.

As was true in Nebraska, the Democratic leaders of Iowa were more strongly convinced of the importance of tariff reform than were the rank and file of party members. The Iowa state committee in an effort to stir up more enthusiasm for free trade invited Morton to aid them in their campaign. He accepted the invitation cheerfully, provided the announcements would be plain statements that he would endeavor to discuss the evils of protection and prohibition, and would contain "no prefixes to my name and no promises of entertainments which I cannot furnish."¹⁸

¹⁵ *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 1883.

¹⁶ *Chicago Times*, [June 5?] 1883.

¹⁷ *Omaha Herald*, June 7, 1883.

¹⁸ Morton to J. H. Kinne, June 20, 1883.

Morton felt that he could devote his time to the Democracy of Iowa in spite of the fact that he retained his position as chairman of the State Central Committee in Nebraska. The odd-year elections never excited much interest in either party, and did not lend themselves so well to a vigorous campaign for principle as did the regular elections. Morton was not one to devote his time to a hopeless campaign concerned largely with offices, and relatively unimportant ones at that. Nevertheless, before leaving, he made sure that the party stood firmly by its free trade guns. There was some sentiment in the state for a modification of the platform of 1882, but this Morton was determined to prevent. He wrote Dr. Miller: "If we as Democrats dodge the issue a Free Trade Party will be formed; it will be big enough to beat us and ought to beat us. We can not be cowards and succeed. I would rather be associated with scholars and statesmen than with paltry politicians."¹⁹

When the Democratic State Convention met at Omaha, August 29, Morton, after getting it organized, received his favorite appointment—chairman of the committee on resolutions—and reported a platform which repeated the tariff plank of 1882, along with sundry denunciations of alleged Republican malfeasances, and a second plank on the tariff by which Morton hoped to link the evils of protection with all of the others declared to be inherent in Republican national administration. It declared:

That "protection," so-called, derives no part of its impulse or maintenance from reasoning or common sense; but is wholly a scheme of a few selfish men for their own aggrandizement at the expense of the masses of the people, and like the late river and harbor bill, vetoed by President Arthur, the worse a protective tariff bill, the more likely it is to be enacted because the log-rolling for it is fiercer and more shameless.²⁰

The platform, as Morton reported it, was adopted by the convention.

The Democrats of Nebraska once again officially secured for free trade, Morton turned his attention to the Iowa campaign. The Iowans wanted him for almost a month, and had mapped out a strenuous itinerary including practically all of the important towns in the southern part of the state.²¹

¹⁹ Morton to Miller, August 8, 1883.

²⁰ *Omaha Herald*, August 30, 1883.

²¹ Kinne to Morton, July 9, 1883.

In anticipation of the speaking tour, Professor Perry sent a copy of his latest book, *Political Economy*,²² with the hope that it would aid Morton "to refute triumphantly every falsity of Senator Allison." The Professor added a word of encouragement and advice: "Good luck to you in your campaign. Blow your trumpet soundly! Talk it right down to the common land, & don't try to be eloquent."²³

Morton was in fine fettle and replied to his tariff mentor: "In Iowa I shall get right down to hard facts and 'grub up' all the protection brush and thistles I find. And as I begin, on the 10th of Sept. right where Allison and Wilson began their campaign I shall have a good chance for work. The New Perry will go along with and inspire me. . . ." ²⁴

Morton maintained throughout his entire tour the enthusiasm with which he started. His speeches were similar to those he had used in his campaign for the governorship in 1882, an indication of the importance that issues, rather than men, played in his political thinking. He devoted the major part of each discussion to the tariff, taking the farmer through a typical day, showing how he was taxed at every turn. He also ventilated fully the falsities of prohibition as he saw them, and, naturally, spiced his work with pointed gibes at Republican office holders, both within and without the state.

It is difficult to measure his success. Editors in Iowa appear to have had little more concern for accuracy in reporting political events than did their colleagues across the Missouri River. For example, while Henry J. Phillpott's *Iowa State Leader* described Morton's speech at Des Moines with the words: "Nebraska's great orator whose clarion voice has rung upon the stump from end to end of our sister state . . . appeared in Des Moines . . . to a fine audience in the large court room filling it to overflowing with hundreds of intelligent auditors eager to listen to the man whose gallant run for governor last year is not forgotten . . . and as he bowed and took his seat, round after round of applause was given and the audience dispersed in a blaze of enthusiasm";²⁵ the *Des Moines State Register*, a Republican paper, declared the crowd a small one, and such as it was,

²² Arthur Latham Perry, *Political Economy* (New York, n.d.).

²³ Perry to Morton, August 18, 1883.

²⁴ Morton to Perry, August 28, 1883.

²⁵ September 24, 1883.

"got together . . . by the strenuous efforts of a brass band," and that "altogether it was a very tame affair."²⁶

Morton recorded the trip briefly in the Arbor Lodge Journal, and on the whole he seemed rather well pleased with the way he had been received, though at times he observed, "fair success, nothing to brag about," or of another meeting: "Little good in it either to me or audience."

Morton had hardly rested from the Iowa campaign and voted for the Democratic candidates in Nebraska's judicial election, when he began to agitate the importance of making the tariff the central issue of the presidential campaign in 1884. He wrote to Colonel William R. Thomson, national committeeman from Iowa, who was in Washington, asking for new information on the revenue question:

Please send me . . . speeches and documents about the Protective Tariff. We must make the fight hotter and hotter and carry the war for Free Trade into the next National Democratic Convention and vitalize the platform with an unequivocal avowal of enmity to the system of Protection. We must do this, or resolve that we are cowards and adjourn to take in the following November our quadrennial licking for being blockheads and blunderers.

If Democracy dare not declare for commercial freedom we must have a new party which will so declare. . . .²⁷

Morton began to speak quite freely of both the possibility and the necessity of a split in the Democratic Party should that body dodge the tariff issue in its national convention. Interviewed on one of his visits to Chicago by reporters from the *Times*, the *Tribune*, and the *Inter-Ocean*, he said that should the free traders be trampled under in the national convention he was in favor of forming an independent party. "The men in the party who are working for free trade," he said, "won't truckle for office and sacrifice principle for votes."²⁸

In the same vein, he wrote to E. G. Taylor of Kansas City, a prominent Missouri Democrat who had been active in the promotion of a free trade convention at St. Louis: "The legalized larceny of the protective system is being exposed everywhere; and all think-

²⁶ September 23, 1883.

²⁷ Morton to William R. Thomson, November 16, 1883.

²⁸ *Chicago Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, December 16, 1883.

ing, honest men of all parties are awakening to a realization of the enormous injustice it works to the people. Either Democracy must denounce protection or commercial freedom will denounce and renounce Democracy. Presidents are mortal, Principles are immortal." ²⁹

So frequent and emphatic were Morton's proclamations on the importance of a party devoted to the principle of free trade, that rumors appeared in the press that he had severed his connection with the Democratic Party. His son Paul wondered if the rumors were true. He urged his father to consider the advisability of a moderate course: "My idea is that the Democrats had better get into office on the platform of reform and regulate the tariff after they get things better shaped." ³⁰

The rumors were unfounded. Paul had as little need in 1884 to worry that his father had left the Democratic Party, as he had right to hope that he would adopt a moderate course on the tariff.

In order to be near the center of the nation's political life during the crucial pre-convention weeks, and also to recoup a pocketbook that had prospered but little during a year of almost constant advocacy of tariff reform, Morton accepted, in January, an offer of the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad to make him its special representative before the Commerce Committee of the House of Representatives. It was a temporary position and appears to have been merely for the purpose of presenting the railroad's case against the Reagan Bill, pending before the committee.³¹ The hearings dragged slowly. The Burlington became interested in other legislation. Arrangements were made for Morton to remain in Washington until the end of the session, or the convening of the Democratic National Convention. Morton wrote his sister, Emma Morton, that Washington was the place to be during the months before the convention; the salary would prove useful, and the railroad would pay his expenses, "which amount to considerable as I live well and generously as becomes an aged gentleman of my tastes." ³²

²⁹ Morton to E. G. Taylor, December 21, 1883.

³⁰ Paul Morton to Morton, March 19, 1884.

³¹ Memorandum, initialed by Morton and Perkins, January 21, 1884.

³² Morton to Emma Morton, June 17, 1884.

Moreover, the work left him plenty of time to prepare the way for a free trade declaration by the Democratic National Convention.

When the Democratic National Committee met in Washington, February 22, for the purpose of fixing the time and place of the national convention, Morton, in an effort to commit the party to the doctrine of free trade and at the same time to forestall any movement to turn the regular "call" of the convention over to the executive committee, introduced the following as the "call" to be issued for the convention:

All citizens of the United States, whatever their political connections may have heretofore been, who now hold with the Democracy of the Union that taxes constitutionally should be levied upon the people only with the intent and result of getting money into the National Treasury with which to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States, and that these taxes should be so small as neither to heap up surplus revenue in the Treasury nor artificially raise the prices of the necessities and comforts of life; that all national legislation creating any privileged class, either under tariff laws or under patent laws, or otherwise, is always at the expense of the people and ought always to be resisted by them through agitation and repeal till all the citizens in fact enjoy equal rights under the Government; that capitalists, as such, are entitled to no more weight in our system of Government than laborers, as such, and that the real interests of these two classes under fair and equal laws are identical, and that all laborers are entitled to expend their wages for the commodities of their choice at the natural prices of such commodities in the markets of the world; that the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution nor prohibited by it to the States are reserved to the States respectively, as to the people; that the expenditures from the National Treasury should be sharply watched and be made strictly to conform in amount to the product of the light and simple taxes, which alone are needful to meet the current expense of our National Government and to provide for the gradual extinction of the public debt; and lastly that the Republican Party which has continued to be corrupt in every branch of the public administration has been already too long in power for the vital interest of the people, and ought, therefore, in the coming autumn to be overthrown by the people at the polls, are cordially invited to send delegates to the Democratic National Convention to be holden at Chicago upon the 8th day of July, 1884.⁸³

Morton's resolution met with immediate objection, particularly from the committee members from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. After some discussion, it was voted down, and Morton withdrew it from the files of the committee. The call as finally adopted was an

⁸³ *New York World*, February 23, 1884.

innocuous, technical instrument, committing the party to no course whatsoever, and containing as its only political sentiment, an invitation to "all Democratic conservative citizens of the United States, irrespective of past political associations and differences, who can unite with us in the effort for pure, economical and constitutional government."³⁴

Having thus been foiled, Morton made an attempt to bring pressure for tariff reform on the national convention by seeking to get the delegates from several states of the West instructed for free trade. He thought that if a number of state conventions were held the same day, and all adopted the same platform in favor of free trade it would have a good effect upon the national convention. He wrote to William F. Vilas that Nebraska, Kansas, and Indiana planned to hold their state conventions June 25; and that Nebraska and Kansas at least were to adopt the Nebraska tariff plank of 1882—on the unconstitutionality of the tariff. He wondered if Vilas could not persuade the Democrats of Wisconsin to hold their convention on the same day and adopt the same declaration.³⁵

Vilas found the Wisconsin Democrats "quite unwilling" to defer the date of their state convention so late as June 25, although he wanted to assure Morton that "the tone of our resolutions on the tariff question will be clear."³⁶

All of Morton's preconvention effort appears to have been a mere grasping at straws; yet he kept it up. The Morrison Bill, reported on March 11 by the representative from Illinois who was chairman of the committee on ways and means, provided for a very considerable reduction in all of the existing tariff schedules, except those on liquors and silk which were left unchanged, and added salt, coal, and lumber to the free list.³⁷ Morton thought the Morrison Bill a step in the right direction and was solicitous that all men in the Northwest write to Morrison and to Frank Hurd, a representative from Ohio who had been at the Detroit Free Trade Conference, "urging them to stand firmly and gamely to their work."³⁸ Morrison

³⁴ *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention . . .*, 1884. (New York, n.d.), xxii.

³⁵ Morton to W. L. Vilas, February 24, 1884.—Vilas Mss.

³⁶ Vilas to Morton, March 22, 1884.

³⁷ Cf. Edward Stanwood, *American Tariff Controversies in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston, 1904), II:220.

³⁸ Cf. Morton to Vilas, February 24, 1884; also March 6, 1884.—Vilas Mss.

and Hurd "stood gamely," but that tariff reform was by no means ensconced in Democratic thinking in the early months of 1884 is evident in the defeat of the bill, made possible in a House which had a Democratic majority of nearly eighty only by the fact that forty-one Democrats voted against it.³⁹

Another discouraging indication of the state of Democratic opinion on the tariff was the general tone of a Tariff and Civil Service Reform dinner given in Brooklyn, New York, on April 5, under the auspices of the Young Men's Democratic Club of that city. Morton was asked to respond to a toast, along with Senator Thomas F. Bayard, George H. Pendleton, Frank Hurd, General Slocum, Andrew MacLean, and others prominent in the Democratic Party. Morton responded to the toast, "Politics for Offices Only, with Incidental Patriotism." He denounced the Republican Party as desirous of obtaining office above all else, and then warned that there was danger of the same sentiment permeating the Democratic Party. As a basis for his warning, he read his "call" which had been rejected by the National Democratic Committee, and an editorial in the *New York Sun*, in which that paper declared its main objection to Morton's tariff platform, the belief that the Democrats could not be elected in 1884 with such a declaration.⁴⁰ All of the other speakers denounced the policy of protection as practiced by the Republicans, but only one indicated that he was in favor of anything more than the most moderate reform: Senator Bayard, who called the protective tariff "legislative communism," and in language similar to that always used by Morton in discussing the question, expressed his most emphatic desire for a tariff for revenue only.⁴¹

There were other indications that Morton's ideas would not prevail. Even in his home state of Nebraska, he seems to have lost control of affairs. His plan for holding the state convention on the same day as those of Kansas and Indiana was dropped for an earlier date, May 22. Morton's absence from the convention gave Dr. Miller, James E. Boyd, A. J. Poppleton and others who believed in the doctrine of moderate reform espoused by many of the Eastern

³⁹ Stanwood, *op. cit.*, II:221.

⁴⁰ Cf. *New York Sun*, March 1, 1884.

⁴¹ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 6, 1884.

representatives of the party an opportunity to defeat Morton's tariff declaration. The resolution adopted by the convention declared only: "That in view of the unequal and discriminating operation of the existing tariff and the unjust and excessive burdens imposed upon the people, we are in favor of a revision which shall limit it to the production of the necessary revenues of the government economically administered. . . ." ⁴²

Though the *Omaha Herald* asserted that no principle of tariff reform was surrendered by the platform, and that there was "not a shadow of protection in it," ⁴³ Morton in an open letter to the *Plattsmouth Journal*, said that he still favored the declaration of 1882 and would advocate it at Chicago, "and defy alike protection Democrats and protection Republicans, asking favors of neither."⁴⁴

Morton arrived early in Chicago. The press of the city noting his arrival the same day as that of Henry Watterson, editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, and Congressman Morrison, observed that the tariff reformers were first on the scene of the engagement. It was the general opinion that these men had come early in order to counsel together in an effort to force their doctrines of tariff reform upon the convention. They let it be known that they considered the platform more important than the nomination. Morrison was quoted as saying that the platform took precedence over everything else. In his opinion, with a good platform the party could run almost any candidate and be sure of success. Morton had the same idea. The *Chicago Daily News*, gossiping about the candidates, explained his position: "Ex-Gov. Sterling Morton is . . . for Bayard if he can switch off of his tariff hobby long enough to quit talking about the price of shoes if the country had tariff for revenue only and seriously think who he could be for." ⁴⁵

The first contests on the tariff question were waged in the state delegations over the selection of members of the committee on resolutions. The sharpest one appears to have been in the Nebraska delegation, where disagreement on the tariff was augmented by

⁴² *Omaha Herald*, May 23, 1884.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, May 27, 1884.

⁴⁴ Morton to C. W. Sherman, May 28, 1884.

⁴⁵ *Chicago Daily News*, July 5, 1884.

personal differences. A strong case was made for Morton by the presentation in caucus of a petition signed by a large number of Nebraska Democrats. The petition read:

The Republicans have declared for protection. We, the undersigned Nebraska Democrats, trust that the Democracy will declare for the constitutional sheet-anchor of tariff reform. Therefore we beg you to appoint the Hon. J. Sterling Morton, the fearless and able advocate of that eminently Democratic principle, as the member for Nebraska on the Committee on Platform.

After a long discussion, Morton was elected to the committee.⁴⁶ The only other free traders of national reputation in the group were Morrison and Watterson. Nationally prominent members who were judged conservatives on the tariff issue, were: George L. Converse of Ohio, Malcolm Hay of Pennsylvania, Henry G. Davis of West Virginia, E. P. Howell of Georgia, and E. A. Burke of Maine. Two men of moderate views who were expected to have considerable influence in bringing the opposing factions together were Abram S. Hewitt, and Benjamin F. Butler, the latter a renegade from the Republican Party, and a candidate for the presidency on the Anti-Monopolist ticket.

No sooner had the committee got organized than it became evident that the clash of opinion among its numerous strong-willed members would make effective work by the entire group almost impossible. To solve the problem, a subcommittee was appointed to draft a platform. It appears that most of the strong wills found their way into the subcommittee, which consisted of eight members. Representing the radical tariff reformers were Morton, Morrison, and Watterson; representing the conservatives, Davis, Converse, and Burke; representing the moderates, Hewitt and Butler.

As soon as it was appointed, the subcommittee went to work in General Butler's rooms in the Palmer House. There was some difference of opinion on all of the planks, but the tariff proved from the outset to be the main barrier to agreement. It appeared for a while that a satisfactory conclusion would be impossible. Watterson threatened to take the issue to the floor of the convention, and break the party wide open, if necessary.⁴⁷ This was forestalled by the development of a willingness to compromise, on both sides, and the

⁴⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 1884.

⁴⁷ *Chicago Times*, July 10, 1884.

final adoption of a long and not altogether plain statement of the Democratic position on the vital tariff issue. It promised that Democratic tariff reform would be "cautious and conservative in methods, not in advance of public opinion, but responsive to its demands." Furthermore, in making reductions in the tariff, it was not proposed to injure any domestic industries, "but rather to promote their healthy growth." Yet the plank also demanded, "that Federal taxation shall be exclusively for public purposes and shall not exceed the needs of the Government economically administered."⁴⁸

Only Ben Butler refused to accept the work of the committee. He took his opposition to the tariff plank, and, indeed, to the entire platform, to the floor of the convention.

"Read that tariff plank and then see if you can find out exactly what it does mean," he urged. "It does not mean protection. . . . And yet it is twisted so that it is supposed that it might mean protection. Democrats in the convention, you passed a tariff plank in 1876—a tariff for revenue only—only for revenue—and you had a statesman that could carry a very poor platform on his back and yet win. In 1880 you had a tariff for revenue only. It broke the back of the most gallant soldier of the country and you lost. And now you have got a tariff for public purposes exclusively. What is the difference? 'Exclusively' means 'only'; 'only' means 'exclusively.' Think it over. . . ."⁴⁹

Butler warned the group that if it adopted such a declaration, he would be unable to work with them. To this, Henry Watterson, who had declared the revenue plank one upon which all could afford to stand, replied: "I fear that we shall have to throw ourselves on his other alternative and rely upon God, to Whom he has kindly referred us."⁵⁰

Morton expressed the opinion that Butler had come to Chicago and attempted to have a protectionist platform adopted just for the sake of making trouble. He added: "I am of the belief that we ought to have kicked him out of the convention. Indeed we ought never to have allowed him in it."⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Chicago Herald*, July 11, 1884.

⁴⁹ *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention* . . ., 1884, 207.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁵¹ *Chicago Times*, July 13, 1884.

The platform finally was adopted as reported by the committee. No one was completely satisfied with it, yet Morton and Watterson seemed quite cheerful about the outcome of the struggle and quite proud of what they considered clever tactics. Watterson declared: "If anyone can see anything in that platform that savors of protection he deserves a chromo, as being gifted with an abnormal amount of perception."⁵²

It was at Morton's suggestion that the word "exclusively" had been substituted for "only." When asked by a reporter why he had made the change, he said: "It takes up more space, my boy."⁵³

The general impression was that Morton and Watterson felt they got what amounted to a declaration for revenue only through the committee by means of a trick. When asked by a reporter if they had done so, Watterson laughingly replied: "We did."⁵⁴

The *Chicago Herald* took the two men to task for leaving such an impression: "We think Messrs. Watterson and Morton are claiming a little too much when they say they secured the introduction of the words 'tariff for public purposes exclusively' into the platform by means of a trick, and are inclined to believe that they have been misquoted. The high tariff advocates on that committee are quite as capable of understanding the meaning of that expression as they are. It means a tariff for revenue only. . . ." ⁵⁵

The platform was acceptable, possibly because each person could find a statement, which, if emphasized and twisted a little, would express his view. Regardless of the enthusiasm he might have displayed at the convention, Watterson, in later life, admitted that all they had achieved was "a straddle."⁵⁶ Probably the reason why it was acceptable was that save in the minds of the ardent free traders the tariff was not an issue in 1884.⁵⁷ And for the free traders, there was the word "exclusively," which meant "only."

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ July 14, 1884.

⁵⁶ Henry Watterson, "*Marse Henry*," *An Autobiography* (New York, 1919), II:122.

⁵⁷ Cf. Stanwood, *op. cit.*, II:224.

CHAPTER TWENTY

FUSION CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR

MORTON RETURNED FROM the National Democratic Convention to continue the free trade campaign in Nebraska. The ambiguity of the national platform did not obstruct his efforts. Although it was obscured by much verbiage, the declaration, "a tariff for public purposes exclusively" was in the platform; and anyone who so desired could see that it meant "a tariff for revenue only." In Nebraska, moreover, local issues overshadowed the national ones, and any inconsistency in Morton's position on the tariff was pushed into the background by the larger anomalies. Indeed, despite Morton's efforts to make it so, the tariff was no more of an issue in Nebraska in 1884 than it was in the nation at large. The vital issues grew out of what seemed to the people the beginnings of strange animosities, and even stranger friendships.

The animosities which seemed so strange were the ones developing between Morton and Dr. Miller. Though the relations between the two old pioneers had been somewhat strained since their disagreement over the *pro rata* question in 1876,¹ they had been intimately associated in the public thinking since 1855. Their differences on the advisability of making an eleventh hour fight to elect James E. Boyd to the Senate in 1883 had not been publicized. The public's first hint that Miller and Morton were not getting on resulted from the two men's disagreement over the tariff during the months pre-

¹ See pp. 219-221.

ceding the national convention. Each made it appear at that time that their differences were slight, and were not personal. Soon after the national convention, however, the disagreement became openly personal.

Morton had favored Senator Thomas F. Bayard of Delaware for the presidential nomination. This partiality was the result of respect engendered by personal acquaintance, and a belief, growing out of such utterances as the Brooklyn speech,² that Bayard was sound on the tariff question. The delegates from Nebraska had gone to the convention uninstructed, but it was the general opinion that they would favor Tilden at the beginning, then follow the lead of New York. That state, after much intra-delegation intrigue, settled on its own Governor Cleveland.³ The delegates from Nebraska, with one exception, swung enthusiastically into line. The exception was Morton, whose stubborn nature showed itself once again to his political disadvantage. Neither he nor anyone else knew where Cleveland stood on the tariff. Consequently, Morton stood by Bayard. Under the unit rule, Morton's refusal to join his nine colleagues in voting for Cleveland,⁴ did not affect the outcome, but it created a furor in Nebraska.

On July 12, Dr. Miller printed an editorial in the *Omaha Herald*, entitled "The Glorious Nine." In bold-faced type he listed the names of all the delegates except Morton, and proclaimed to his readers: ". . . Against every cunning effort and all assaults upon their fears and convictions, with Mr. Morton doing his utmost to change them to anybody, or for anybody, or for anything, against Grover Cleveland, the solid Nine have stood like a granite wall from the first to last for Cleveland and victory. . . ." Morton, by refusing to abandon Bayard, "had proven himself to be more devoted to a personal affection than the wishes of the party."⁵

Neither the action of the convention nor the editorials of Dr. Miller swerved Morton from his belief that Bayard would have been the better choice. Illustrative of his opinion is a letter to George H.

² See p. 294.

³ Cf. Denis Tilden Lynch, *Grover Cleveland, A Man Four-Square* (New York, 1932), Chapters XXVIII-XXXIV; Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland, A Study in Courage* (New York, 1933), 149-152.

⁴ Morton cast his vote for Bayard on all ballots, including the last.—*Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention . . .*, 1884, 247.

⁵ *Omaha Herald*, July 12, 1884.

Bates, a member of the Delaware delegation, in which Morton said: "... the prospects are not as they would have been had Mr. Bayard been our candidate and I am not enthusiastic as I would then have been. . . . Present my regards to . . . all the good gentlemen from Delaware who—with myself—were so despondent at Chicago, because principle, character and a lofty mind were put aside for supposed availability, recordlessness and mediocrity." ⁶

The scandals being strewn about concerning Cleveland's alleged earlier misconduct all the more convinced Morton that the New Yorker should not have been the nominee. He wrote to George H. Pendleton: "To my mind, the political outlook is not very satisfactory. Mr. Cleveland's candidature calls up the anecdote of the young medical practitioner on his first case of midwifery, who reported to his former preceptor that the child was dead, and the mother was dead, but that he hoped with good luck to save the old man, and suggests that we are about to reverse that experience by saving Mrs. Halpin and a small boy in Buffalo, and losing the old man. . . ." ⁷

In order to clarify his position, he wrote a letter to Albert Watkins, to be read at a ratification meeting in Lincoln, by which he hoped to justify his action at Chicago.

. . . My conduct and my vote at Chicago was based upon my most honest and deliberate judgment, and it was to the end that the senator from Delaware, . . . might be named as a candidate for the president of the United States. Delegated as I was by the democracy of Nebraska—without any solicitation upon my part and wholly uninstructed; upon my honor as a man, and upon my responsibility and conscience as your fellow citizen I acted and voted. It is for you to approve or condemn, though I may truthfully say that I neither sought to impress my views upon my co-delegates nor to dissuade them from their own conclusions. Had I, in the same light, to again perform the same delegated duty, I would do it in the same way, respecting as I did then and do now, all my fellows who hold equally sincere and entirely different views.

But now, my individualism as to a choice of candidates is *functus officio*; and, with cheerful alacrity, I defer to the selection of Grover Cleveland and Thomas A. Hendricks as the chosen standard bearers of the great multitude of democrats who seek to reform the administration of the government by overthrowing the plutocracy which now controls it and by setting up in its stead a just, pure and

⁶ Morton to George H. Bates, July 28, 1884.

⁷ Morton to Pendleton, August 12, 1884.

economical executive and legislative power, fresh from the conservative and thinking majority of the people. . . .⁸

While in Lincoln a few days later, he was interviewed by a reporter from the *State Journal*, and when asked about his estrangement from Dr. Miller, replied:

Well, if there is any estrangement or difficulty at all, I can assure you that it is not on my side. I cannot and will not allow the close and personal relations of thirty years standing to be blistered by misunderstanding, doubt, distrust, and bickering. The difference between Dr. Miller and myself is not one of principle. We believe substantially the same things. But I am not a politician. I have no policy, but am an out-and-outer. I do not believe in expediency, or craft, or cunning, but speak out fully and freely what I hold to be the truth. I can't dissimulate or disguise my feelings and principles, but utter them at all times and in all places. Nor do I desire the reputation of being a skilfull politician in the sense that the term is usually employed. . . .⁹

The strange friendships grew out of Morton's determination to run again for the governorship. This decision was reached against the advice of both of his older sons, who, as they developed into men of influence in the business world, took an increasingly greater interest in their father's political career. Joy thought the chances of an election very doubtful, "and it would not pay to be put up for another knock down—there is such a thing as being finally knocked out for good." He added: "In order to make a lively campaign it would be necessary to antagonize the only interest which it has ever paid you to cultivate and as there is no money and not anything that will take its place in political underdoggism I dont believe you can afford to run for Gov. Cant you put in some friend of yours and you run for Congress in 1st District, the chances are very much better for election and you needn't be so anti-monop."¹⁰

Paul gave the same advice: "Run an anti-monop for Governor if necessary & let them (the Antis) vote for you for Congressman of the 1st."¹¹

Morton was not prepared to follow the advice of his sons and wrote them at some length explaining his position. He declared

⁸ Morton to Albert Watkins, July 18, 1884 (Undated clipping, Morton Scrap-books).

⁹ *Nebraska State Journal*, July 31, 1884.

¹⁰ Joy Morton to Morton, August 9, 1884.

¹¹ Paul Morton to Morton, August 9, 1884.

that he had declined positively to become a candidate for Congress, "even if an election were guaranteed." On the other hand, he felt that if he accepted the nomination for the governorship, there would be "very little danger of an election . . . but the opportunity for making a thorough canvass of the state at large, and of doing some didactic speaking upon economic questions would be a very desirable one."

Of his position with regard to the railroads, should he be nominated, he wrote:

Under no circumstances shall I make any campaign speeches to which any reasonable man can take exception, as to my standing relative to corporate capital, and the individual taxpayer. But I shall oppose, if I go on the stump at all, the existing law providing for the taxation of railway property in the State of Nebraska. It is not a righteous law, it is not a law which in the end can do any good to railroads; it is a law which discriminates in their favor, as against the property of citizens and it ought to be repealed. . . .

Each of you knows very well that I am not at all cranky upon the subject of the encroachment of corporate power upon popular rights and all I shall do or endeavor to do will be simply the right, proper and just thing. If the railroads want justice, nothing more, they certainly will be satisfied with what I may say or do as a candidate, and if the people want justice and nothing more, as between themselves and the corporations, they will also be satisfied. But I apprehend that I shall please neither party to the conflict for the reason that I imagine each one desires to overreach the other. . . .¹²

The possibility of fusion between the Democrats and the Anti-Monopolists, hinted at by Morton's sons, was an important factor in the thinking of the two parties during the summer of 1884. There had always been members of both groups who had favored fusion because of the similarity of their beliefs. The movement was given impetus in 1884 by the fact that in the election held two years before, Morton and E. P. Ingersoll, the Anti-Monopolist candidate for governor, had between them polled more votes than the successful Republican candidate.¹³ It took no great amount of political sagacity to see that if both parties united on a single ticket, there was a strong possibility that the long-dominant Republicans might be defeated.

Morton always had opposed fusion as a matter of principle. He would never have objected to receiving Anti-Monopolist votes, of

¹² Morton to Paul and Joy Morton, August 10, 1884.

¹³ *Nebraska State Journal*, November 29, 1882.

course; but he steadfastly refused to change his opinions for the sake of them. In 1882 there had been some talk of a combination, but Morton had silenced it. His opinion at that time was: "It would be a good thing, of course, to enlist the Alliance vote for our ticket if the Alliance requires no sacrifice of principle from us." Democracy, Morton held, had always been the enemy of monopoly. The party was then faced with what he believed to be the greatest monopoly in the history of the republic—the tariff: "If the Alliance wish to help in this slaughter of a great monopoly—wish to help in the taking off of this Mother of all the Monster Monopolies of the Country I shall rejoice in their assistance."¹⁴

This, essentially, was Morton's attitude in 1884. He would make friends with the Anti-Monopolists; he would praise the honesty with which they advocated their doctrines; but he would campaign only upon the principles he believed to be right.

Strangely enough, perhaps, Morton's opinions on most public questions did not differ greatly from those held by the Anti-Monopolists. He could denounce abuses connected with the railroads as fervently as the most ardent Anti-Monopolist. The latter, in turn, supported his views on the tariff. They were quite agreed on problems. They were fundamentally opposed, however, on the question of solutions. The Anti-Monopolists favored regulation. Morton favored complete and consistent *laissez faire*.

Edward Rosewater, editor of the *Omaha Bee*, who had made himself one of the leading spokesmen for the Anti-Monopolists, considered this disagreement fundamental and destructive of any hope that fusion under Morton's leadership could possibly succeed. He probably was animated in this thinking to a certain extent by distrust of Morton engendered during his years as a Republican. Shortly before the Anti-Monopolist State Convention the *Bee* published a long editorial on "The Opportunity of the Democracy." The opportunity was the achievement of victory for the first time since Nebraska had been admitted to the Union. The method was the nomination of a candidate for governor whom the Anti-Monopolists could support. After this introduction, Rosewater got down to the burden of his message:

¹⁴ Morton to Isaac LeDoigt, Hastings, September 19, 1882.

Now J. Sterling Morton is a man of splendid abilities, and he would undoubtedly grace the governor's chair or any other office within the gift of the people of Nebraska, but Mr. Morton has no natural affinity with anti-monopoly principles so far as they apply to the regulation of railroads. His honest sentiments were expressed time and again through the columns of the *Chicago Times* and the *Omaha Herald*. Whether his relations with the Burlington are broken off or still exist is immaterial. He cannot convince the people of Nebraska that his change of heart on this vital issue of anti-monopoly is sincere. It would be impossible for any true anti-monopolist to champion his election except as a last resort. His defeat, even if he were endorsed by the anti-monopoly convention through some dicker, would be a foregone conclusion, and he would carry the whole ticket with him. . . . Mr. Morton may not realize his own weakness as an anti-monopolist, but we admonish his friends and admirers to reflect before they plunge their party into another foolhardy campaign. . . .

The editorial then discussed the reasons why Morton could not be elected, concluding with what probably seemed to the editor as the most important—the *Bee* would not support him.¹⁵

Rosewater went to the convention determined to block any endorsement of Morton. He met unexpected opposition. The night before the convention, the Anti-Monopolists held a caucus. General Victor Vifquain, one of Morton's close friends, was present. During the Seventies, as editor of the *Lincoln Democrat*, he had been active in leading the party into the doctrine of fiat money. At that time, his relation with Morton had been one of mutual contempt. Since then, however, Vifquain had moderated his views, and from a rather close association had developed high respect for Morton's character and abilities. He reported the action of the caucus, Rosewater's unexpected opposition, and the strange support given Morton.

That support came from David Butler, whom Morton always maintained had swindled him out of the first governorship of the state, and about whom he had never said one favorable word. In the words of Vifquain: "At the A[nti] M[onopolist] caucus last night Butler fought for you like a hero. Says he to them, 'You, you, you (and pointing his finger at the fellows who objected to you) why do you oppose him? If there is a man in Nebraska that should oppose Morton, it is me; yet I am for Morton. I am for Morton because I honestly believe that he's not only the best, but the strongest man. He is the great educator of our people. He has opened my eyes on

¹⁵ *Omaha Bee*, September 8, 1884.

the monopoly tariff. He has opened the eyes of thousands of others &c &c.' He done nobly."¹⁶

Rosewater, sensing a willingness to support Morton, attempted to turn the tide against fusion altogether. In this he was unsuccessful and the caucus, by a close vote, decided to unite with the Democrats, and leave the choice of the ticket to a committee, composed of one member from each county delegation, instructed to meet with a similar committee from the Democratic convention. The convention adopted the decision of the caucus.

Two days later, Morton as chairman of the State Central Committee, called the Democratic State Convention to order in the Academy of Music at Omaha. James E. Boyd was elected chairman, and, in the tradition of many another Democratic meeting, Morton was chosen chairman of the committee on resolutions. Reporting for the committee, he stated that they wholeheartedly endorsed the national platform and the nominations of Cleveland and Hendricks, and in addition reaffirmed the statements of the state platform of 1882 and 1883 on prohibition and the relations of corporate capital to the people.

After a long discussion, the Democrats voted to fuse with the Anti-Monopolists, and appointed a committee to meet with the men sent to Omaha from the Lincoln convention. D. P. Rolfe, Morton's close friend of long standing, was appointed chairman of the committee. Reporting for the group he said that the Democrats were to nominate the governor, treasurer, secretary of state, and attorney general; and the Anti-Monopolists, the lieutenant governor, auditor, commissioner of public lands, and superintendent of public instruction. The convention finally agreed to accept the committee's report.¹⁷

It was not until three o'clock in the morning that the nominations were reached. There were calls for adjournment until later in the day, but the majority of the delegates wanted to stick it out until their work was completed. The candidate for governor, of course, was first on the list. James E. North of Columbus put Morton's name before the convention. There was a burst of applause. Morton was nominated unanimously, and by acclamation. Despite the

¹⁶ Vifquain to Morton, September 9, 1884.

¹⁷ *Omaha Herald*, September 12, 1884.

lateness of the hour, the delegates clamored for a speech. They got it—one of those rousing speeches calculated to instill enthusiasm in even the most sluggish Democratic heart.

Morton was deeply affected by the ovation that accompanied the mention of his name. "If there is anything that could possibly inspire me to the renewal of my faith in all the great principles which underlie this party," he said, "it is just such an expression of confidence from you, given without solicitation, with spontaneity, and with such unanimity."

He made it clear that the campaign would be conducted on the basis of Democratic principles, "whether it makes votes for or against me." Of the Anti-Monopolists, he said:

I am glad we have the help here in this fight of a large number of citizens and taxpayers who heretofore have been against us. Supposing that two years ago the vote given for the other candidate had been concentrated on Ingersoll there would have been no school land steals, and it would have saved the people a million dollars and would have elected the anti-monopoly candidate. If you could have saved that then you can save something now unless the buildings at Lincoln have become infected with theft; it may be that your candidates will all have to be vaccinated. It may be that the buildings should be thoroughly fumigated. . . .

With a pledge to speak in every organized county in the state, Morton closed, consciously or otherwise, with David B. Butler's old phrase, "thanking you from my heart of hearts."¹⁸

Before the convention adjourned at seven o'clock in the morning, Morton was re-elected chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee, without a dissenting vote.

Dr. Miller, who had spoken out so sharply against Morton's conduct at the National Convention, had said little during the proceedings that resulted in the fusion of the Democrats and the Anti-Monopolists under the leadership of his erstwhile friend. On the day after the convention, he explained his position of unenthusiastic acquiescence: ". . . In deference to the wishes of friends weeks ago, we did not interpose the influence of the *Herald* in opposition to the policy which was finally adopted. When we saw the veterans of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, September 13, 1884. See p. 142.

Otoe County, by whose side we have fought many battles, declaring for fusion under the lead of Mr. Morton himself, and high authority was quoted for the statement that he had been in personal counsel with Mr. Ingersoll, Mr. Burroughs, Gen. Vifquain¹⁹ and other prominent leaders of the anti-monopoly element to secure fusion, and especially when we saw James E. Boyd and the Douglas county democracy fall into line, we foresaw that the work was already done so far as the state ticket was concerned.”²⁰

Seemingly in forecast of the kind of campaign they intended to conduct, the Republican press greeted Morton's nomination with derision and a barrage of personal abuse. The *Omaha Republican* declared him to be “just a common, selfish, unprincipled, ambitious, audacious, time-serving, railroad, anti-monopoly democrat,” and the men who endorsed his nomination, “a crowd of political hacks and spavined frauds calling themselves ‘anti-monopolists.’”²¹ The *Freemont Tribune* called him, “the prince of monopolists in Nebraska.”²² Edward Rosewater, unable to control the Anti-Monopolists, abandoned them, declaring that the members of the conference committee who had agreed to Morton's nomination had “outraged all decency.” Morton himself was pronounced “a rank monopolist . . . the representative of the worst element of the democratic party which for years has been playing into the hands of monopolies wherever it has had an opportunity.”²³

All during the campaign, the Republican newspapers, led by the *Bee* and the *Republican* in Omaha, and the *State Journal* in Lincoln, persisted in personal abuse. In any political contest in which he had been interested, Morton's vigorous personality had exerted a magnetic attraction for the missiles of his opponents; but never before had he been the victim of a systematic program of vituperation. Insofar as the Republicans were concerned, virtually the only issue in the state campaign was Morton; and they made the most of it. The fusionist candidate's past was gone over with a fine-toothed comb. Every instance of his disagreement with the popular majority was exploited to the fullest; the meaning of other activities was dis-

¹⁹ Miller never recognized Vifquain as a bona fide Democrat.

²⁰ *Omaha Herald*, September 13, 1884.

²¹ September 13, 1884.

²² September 16, 1884.

²³ *Omaha Bee*, September 13, 1884.

torted, often through the addition of falsities; stories were fabricated that contained not a grain of truth.

The salt lands case, which had been the cause of much vexation and finally had resulted in heavy losses, was dragged into the papers and aired as an attempted salt land "steal." The charge was made that the Supreme Court had thrown out the case on the grounds of fraud, and that Morton, by his attempted "steal," had cost the state over \$10,000, in attorney's fees.²⁴ As a result of the long and troublesome suit, saline lands in Nebraska had become a most distasteful subject. To have it bob up again, and in such fashion, must indeed have been discouraging. The implication that anything like a "steal" had been contemplated was absolutely false. To refute it, a letter was made public from George B. Lake, a member of the State Supreme Court, who had twice heard the case. Judge Lake wrote: ". . . there was nothing which in the least degree implicated you, or any one acting for you, in any fraud or deception, or attempt thereat, of the government of the United States or any of its land officers, in their acquisition. . . ." He also declared that the question of whether or not the lands in question were subject to private entry had long been a doubtful one, and there were "many able lawyers, and judges even" who believed that they were.²⁵

The charge that Morton had cost the state \$10,000 in attorney's fees turned into something of a boomerang; for the Democratic papers, after printing Judge Lake's letter, usually declared that the reason why the case had cost the state so much money was, "that the Republican attorney general who should have argued the case was drunk too much of the time to do it," and had to hire outside help.²⁶

There were other charges. The general fact of Morton's connection with the railroads was well known; but few persons knew the details. The Republican editors wrote much about the connection, but unable to speak specifically, had to confine themselves to general terms, and the discussion of the inconsistency of his position before the people asking for Anti-Monopolist votes.

The *State Journal*, in a long editorial, which it said had been written because "the noise that our democratic and confusion

²⁴ *Omaha Republican*, October 10, 1884.

²⁵ George B. Lake to Morton, October 13, 1884, in *Nebraska City News*, October 18, 1884.

²⁶ Cf. *Lincoln State Democrat*, October 14, 1884.

friends have made wakens some reminiscences and prompts us to ask that party and its champion mud-slinger some personal questions," fully aired what it knew of Morton's connection with the railroad, and implied that he had used his influence with the corporation and the county officials to make profit for himself at the expense of the people. The editorial asked: "Did Mr. Morton, the alleged leader of the anti-monops, this fall, ask as the price of his support of the bonds voted to an Iowa railroad, to induce it to come to the river bank opposite Nebraska City to the amount of ninety thousand dollars, one-third of the entire amount . . . and did he not get the price?" It was the *Journal's* "very decided impression that he did."

The editorial made other attempts to impugn Morton's motives in transactions connected with the development of Nebraska City. It declared that when plans were being laid for building stockyards, Morton had appeared before the Board of Trade and demanded as "the price of his assistance" that the citizens should buy a piece of land belonging to him, "and worth in the market, say two thousand dollars" for six thousand dollars.

Descending to the nadir of charges made in the campaign, the editorial claimed that Morton, as a representative of the cemetery at Nebraska City, had written letters to the owners of lots in the burial ground, giving notice, "that if they did not pay up assessments and put their lots in such order as pleased him on or before a certain date he would cause the bodies of the delinquent dead to be disinterred and 'thrown over the cemetery fence.' . . ." ²⁷

Morton conducted his own campaign seemingly oblivious of the accusations made against him. Friends, however, were not slow to take them up. The *Journal's* allegation regarding the cemetery brought an indignant letter from a large number of Nebraska Citizens, irrespective of political creed, denouncing the statement as "infamously false," and adding: "regardless of political preferments we do not hesitate to pronounce the means resorted to by the Lincoln Journal for engendering political hatred, as cowardly, malicious and untrue." ²⁸

²⁷ *Nebraska State Journal*, October 15, 1884.

²⁸ *Lincoln State Democrat*, October 21, 1884.

The stockyards statement brought a letter from D. P. Rolfe, secretary of the Nebraska City Board of Trade, declaring that Morton had never appeared before that group in connection with the stockyards. He had offered to sell land adjoining the packing house, for \$5,000, not \$6,000; and regarding the *Journal's* statement that it was worth but \$2,000, Rolfe said that it was interesting to note that in 1882, the Board of Trade paid \$4,000 for twenty-seven acres adjoining the eighty acres Morton proposed to sell for \$5,000.²⁹

The Clerk of Otoe County issued a statement declaring that the records of the county showed that "no such issue of bonds to the amount of \$90,000 was ever made to an Iowa railroad as stated in the Lincoln Journal of Oct. 15, 1884."³⁰

For his part, Morton conducted his usual, hard-hitting, vigorous campaign. He was on the stump steadily from September 30 to the eve of election. He challenged Governor Dawes to debate either national or local issues with him, but the challenge was not accepted.³¹

Most of Morton's attention was concentrated upon a tariff "for public purposes exclusively." Provide for such a tariff, he argued before his Anti-Monopolist audiences, and a long step would be taken towards the destruction of all monopolies. Though he concentrated on an issue that was primarily national, Morton had little to say about the national ticket; and there is slight evidence that he gave Cleveland and Hendricks anything more than perfunctory endorsement. His enthusiasms were not easily transferred from one person to another, and he had become too deeply committed to Senator Bayard.

The fusionists found their most potent local issue in the Republican distribution of the lands granted to the state by the federal government for the support of the common schools. The law provided that these could be sold for not less than seven dollars an acre, or leased by anyone in any amount by the annual payment of six per cent of the appraised value per acre. The lands in the western part of the state remained part of the open range until about 1882, when speculators began leasing hundreds of acres. Much of the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, October 23, 1884.

³⁰ *Nebraska City News*, October 20, 1884.

³¹ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1884.

land had been appraised at as low as fifty cents per acre; hence it required an annual payment of only three or four cents an acre to hold the lands on long-term leases. When stockmen began to take an interest in the lands and attempted to lease them for use they found that they had already been taken up, and that if they wanted them they were forced to pay enormous profits to the land syndicates.³² A tremendous cry went up from the stockmen against the land speculators. The Democrats and Anti-Monopolists took it up and added the charge of connivance between the Republican officeholders and the speculators for the purpose of enriching themselves at the expense of the farmers.

The result of what was probably the most bitter and vituperative campaign in the history of the state was similar to all those that had preceded it—victory for the ever-dominant Republican party. Thus Governor Dawes defeated Morton for the second time, and Morton failed for the third time to win the governorship. The vote was 72,835 to 57,634. Elder James G. Miller, a Methodist minister running on the Prohibition ticket, received 2,889.³³

The campaign called out a heavier vote than had ever before been registered in the state. Morton received approximately forty-five per cent of the total vote, as compared to the thirty-two per cent he had received in 1882. The combined votes of the Democratic and Anti-Monopolist candidates in 1882, however, had been approximately fifty-one per cent of the total. Assuming that the Democrats supported him, one must conclude that Morton did not get all of the Anti-Monopolist votes that had been cast for Ingersoll. The probable reason for this is to be found in an article in the *Chicago Daily News*, which, discussing the campaign, predicted Morton's defeat because many of the men who had voted for Ingersoll had been Republicans before they were Anti-Monopolists and it was doubtful that they would vote for an old Democratic war-horse like Morton.³⁴ Moreover, the *Omaha Bee*, from which many farmers got their political opinions, had refused to follow the Anti-Monopolist conven-

³² Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People*, I:622.

³³ Morton-Watkins, III:212.

³⁴ October 30, 1884.

tion, and had declared: "As between Morton and Dawes, give us Dawes every time."³⁵

The charges made against Morton's character, inasmuch as they were promulgated by the most prominent papers of the state, and reiterated by virtually every Republican paper and speaker that got before the people, probably had an important bearing on the result of the campaign. The charges originally had appeared over the name "Investigator." After the election, D. H. Mercer, secretary of the Republican State Committee, wrote a letter to Morton, with permission to make it public, confessing that he was "Investigator," and that he had written the articles. Of them he said:

. . . These articles in the main grew out of statements volunteered to us by a citizen of Nebraska City, who assured us of their verity.

In justice to yourself and our committee I write you that our informant must have been mistaken in the facts, as I have authoritative information to that effect. In this connection allow me to say that the newspapers which published the communications and comments, thereon, were, like the committee and myself, misguided thereby, and in consequence thereof, should not be held blame-worthy. . . .

I sincerely regret that our state and national campaign this year has been so personal and vituperative, and I trust, in this respect, that history will never repeat itself. . . .³⁶

Vindication, perhaps, is good for the soul, but coming after the election, Morton could not regard it very effective as a vote getter.

A reason, probably, why the personal attack on Morton had been rather effective was that the *Omaha Herald*, the largest Democratic paper in the state, had shown comparatively little interest in the state campaign, concentrating its efforts on the national ticket, which, in turn, was somewhat neglected by the men on the state ticket. Miller had printed but one article counteracting the Republican charges—Judge Lake's letter regarding the salt lands—and in printing that had said: "We want it distinctly understood that Mr. Morton and the democratic party are not on the defensive in this campaign, and also that they will not be by any act of *The Herald*."³⁷

³⁵ September 13, 1884.

³⁶ D. H. Mercer to Morton, November 14, 1884; in *Nebraska City News*, November 18, 1884. Mercer, a graduate of the University, was elected congressman (1893-1903) from the Omaha district, but was finally defeated by G. M. Hitchcock.

³⁷ *Omaha Herald*, October 19, 1884.

Neither did the state ticket take the offensive by any act of the *Herald*. The difficulty between Morton and Miller had lain dormant during the campaign; but with the election, and the first Democratic national victory since the Civil War, it flared again into an active rash on the countenance of the party within the state.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL

THE NATIONAL VICTORY IN 1884 virtually wrecked the Democratic Party in Nebraska. In probably no other state was Democratic lust for office more vigorous, or more unblushing; for not only had the Democrats of Nebraska been denied federal positions of any kind for almost a quarter of a century, they had never held so much as a single state office.¹ It is little wonder that every post office, every federal appointment within the state, became the object of intense solicitude.

From the outset, there was disagreement regarding the amount of influence that the Democratic Party in the state should exercise as an organization in the distribution of the federal patronage. Animosities that had lain dormant during the campaign sprang to life with alarming vigor. In particular, the old rift between Morton and Miller grew apace.

Morton was convinced that all recommendations for federal appointments should clear through the state committee. To that end, and upon the urging of several members of the group, he convened the state committee at Lincoln, December 23. As stated in the call, the purpose of the meeting was to hear a report of the executive committee relative to the state campaign and to attend to "much other important and vital business." He urged that every member be present: "The work of the committee is just now beginning. The

¹ Phelps D. Sturdevant, a Democrat, was elected state treasurer on the fusion ticket in 1884.

power of the organization of democracy in Nebraska is now to be tried. The judgment and patriotism of each member of the party is now to be tested, in the full light and significance of the thought, 'public office is a public trust.'"²

Dr. Miller immediately interpreted the call as an indication that Morton desired to control the patronage of the state, and he set out at length in an editorial in the *Herald* his doubts concerning the "important and vital business" that was to be discussed.³

Morton naturally was anxious to strengthen his position in the party by placing his friends in public office, but he wanted to do this not at the expense of the Democratic organization of the state, but for its advantage. Such benefits as would accrue to him would come incidentally, by virtue of his position as chairman of the state committee. A letter to Committeeman Joseph Hollman, of Dakota City, is a typical expression of his attitude:

. . . No one man, no syndicate of men, ought to control federal appointments in Nebraska. But the Whole Democracy should voice in each precinct and County the wishes of the majority in its organization regarding the bestowment of federal offices. The best men mentally and morally should, with a faithful acknowledgement for the services they have rendered, and a due discrimination as to fitness, be selected in each county for such positions. We must all endeavor to do right and thus strengthen, perpetuate and increase the Democracy of the State. Come to the Committee Meeting. . . .⁴

Morton wrote to Victor Vifquain that he was not at all sure of the committee; but he was satisfied that his motives were "good and the cause just for convoking it." Should the committee refuse to take responsibility for the patronage, Morton recognized that it would be a victory for Dr. Miller and National Committeeman Boyd. "But," he added, "I can stand defeat for Right anytime."⁵

The committee meeting proved to be something of an anti-climax. There was little agreement on the proper method of handling the patronage, and the group decided to hold the question in abeyance until after the inauguration.⁶ This, Dr. Miller thought, was "a wise as well as a dignified step . . . for what more unseemly exhibition

² Morton Letterbooks.

³ *Omaha Herald*, December 14, 1884.

⁴ Morton to Joseph Hollman, November 27, 1884.

⁵ Morton to Vifquain, December 10, 1884.

⁶ *Lincoln State Democrat*, December 24, 1884.

could a party offer to the country than an organized scramble for the spoils, or even the appearance of a scramble, before the electoral vote is counted or the president-elect had time to select even his most immediate advisers. . . ."⁷

Meanwhile, it appeared that Dr. Miller was taking considerable interest in the selection of those immediate advisers. He had denied, through the columns of the *Herald*, that he wanted or would accept a cabinet position,⁸ yet it was generally believed that he was seeking to be Postmaster General in President Cleveland's cabinet. In any event, soon after the meeting of the state committee, Miller went East to confer with Daniel Manning, William C. Whitney, and various other leading Eastern Democrats with whom he was supposed to be rather intimate. Miller had long been recognized as one of the more prominent Western members of the Tilden machine, and when Manning had shifted the Tilden influence to Cleveland prior to the convention,⁹ he had gone along. There were some grounds for believing that Miller, if not on the cabinet list, might at least be able to get the ear of those close to the President regarding patronage in Nebraska.

Miller's trip was rather well advertised, particularly in that section of the Democratic press which adhered to Morton. The story got back to Nebraska that the Doctor, in order to save time, was travelling incognito, as Dr. M. L. George of New York. It was reported that he had so registered in Chicago.¹⁰ This was a juicy morsel, and the Morton papers snapped it up. For months they referred to the editor of the *Omaha Herald* as "Dr. George," and in cognizance of his supposed desire for a cabinet post, they chanted derisively, "Dr. M. L. G. the P. M. G."

There was some talk of Morton for a place in the new cabinet—possibly more than of Miller. The *Chicago Times* had placed him in its "model cabinet" as secretary of the interior, along with Thomas F. Bayard as secretary of state; John G. Carlisle, treasury; Augustus H. Garland, justice; Joseph E. McDonald, war; John P. Stockton, navy; and George W. Curtis, post office.¹¹ Letters came

⁷ *Omaha Herald*, December 25, 1884.

⁸ December 21, 1884.

⁹ Cf. Nevins, *Grover Cleveland, A Study in Courage*, 147.

¹⁰ *Chicago Daily News*, December 26, 1884.

¹¹ December 5, 1884.

from various men outside the state hoping for his appointment. Senator Vilas, of Wisconsin, had written that he had supposed Morton would be the representative of the Northwest in the cabinet.¹² Professor Perry reported that he was acquainted with the President-elect and had written a letter to him recommending Morton as "a proper person in every way" for Secretary of the Interior.¹³

By such thoughts, however, Morton was not in the least distracted. He felt that his firm stand for Bayard in the convention would cause Mr. Cleveland to abstain from any thought of him as a possible adviser, if indeed anyone from Nebraska were being considered seriously for a cabinet position, which he doubted.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he attempted to counteract any movement for Miller by adding his voice to the chorus praising Senator Vilas as the Western man best fitted for the cabinet role. He wrote to Vilas that he favored him, "because you have pursued the highly honorable path which leads to self respect; and to the highest reputation a patriot can attain, by refusing to personally seek, ask, or inspire your friends, or anybody else, on your behalf, to solicit a place in Pres. Cleveland's Cabinet." He was confident that Cleveland's "clear head, deliberative movement and searching inquiry as to political pedigrees and records" would not allow him to make mistakes in the selection of a cabinet, "unless he allows Tilden and other moribunds to influence him."¹⁵

For most of the Democrats of Nebraska the cabinet was a side issue. The important question was that of patronage within the state. Many of Morton's friends feared that Dr. Miller's trip to the East would redound unfavorably to the party's organization. Morton, though, was not particularly worried. As to many others, he expressed his opinion to Victor Vifquain: "The oriental *incognito* pilgrimage of Dr. M. L. George has as yet brought no very alarming results to our immediate friends who think the Democracy in general instead of a syndicate ought to control matters in Nebraska."¹⁶

Cheerfully looking toward the state committee meeting scheduled to be held in Omaha, March 19, he wrote N. W. Smails, editor of the Fremont *Herald*:

¹² William F. Vilas to Morton, February 7, 1884.

¹³ Perry to Morton, January 6, 1884.

¹⁴ Morton to Brown, December 29, 1884.

¹⁵ Morton to Vilas, February 9, 1885.

¹⁶ Morton to Vifquain, January 6, 1885.

. . . The capers and fantastic antics of our really modest and innocent friend Dr. M. L. George amuse him and all his friends and they are really having what zealous Methodists term "a refreshing season of prayer"—they are praying for offices. They assert that the supplications will be answered in the affirmative. But suppose, for a moment, that they are mistaken and that the Republic be ruthlessly denied the intellectual "level toed, square headed, strong and sound name" of M. L. George appearing as P. M. G. on March 4th. Then on March 19th when the Paxton House Convocation "Konvoketh" where will the mourners find consolation and peace? . . .¹⁷

In answer to the importuning of friends that he go to Washington to counteract the influence of Miller, and of Boyd who also had gone East, Morton wrote that he did not think it "policy" to go to Washington before the committee met: "If Mr. Cleveland is the man his friends claim him to be he will never determine any case until he hears both sides of it."¹⁸

Morton, believing that the committee should handle all of the patronage, was interested not in forcing the issue prior to the meeting, but postponing it until after that time. To this end, he was solicitous that no action be taken on Nebraska appointments until after March 19. He wrote to Charles H. Brown, who was in the East, that his best service for the cause would be to persuade "Cleveland and his friends to make no haste as to filling federal offices in Nebraska."¹⁹ He wrote many of his Eastern friends urging that they do the same. He explained the situation in Nebraska to T. C. Crawford, a Washington newspaper man:

. . . We can make Nebraska as Democratic as it is now Free Trade—in heart; if we only place men of brains, industry and good character in position and thus improve the public service. Personally I wish nothing, ask for nothing and expect to get it; but I do want Miller, Boyd & Co. who have set out to make political places mere matters of personal property, to be disposed of by them, set down upon in the distribution for Nebraska.

The State Democratic Committee of which I am chairman meets March 19th to consider federal appointments in Nebraska and we do not want a single one made before April or May. We are fighting "Bossism" and politics for revenue only. . . .²⁰

Consistent with his opinion that only the committee should handle recommendations for federal office, Morton steadfastly re-

¹⁷ Morton to Smalls, February 18, 1885.

¹⁸ Morton to Vifquain, February 26, 1885.

¹⁹ Morton to Brown, March 1, 1885.

²⁰ Morton to T. C. Crawford, March 2, 1885.

fused to sign a single petition, or write a single letter of recommendation before the group met. In a sense, he also was relying almost wholly upon the committee for his political position. As he wrote to a fellow member: "Should the Committee decline to declare its rights, we need do nothing more. But—I guess—the Committee will not abdicate." ²¹

The committee, however, was not composed entirely, or even largely, of Morton's friends; and at the meeting of March 19, the group did "abdicate" by turning down, in a close vote, a resolution which declared the state committee the proper organization to collect and forward recommendations to Washington. The Miller-Boyd men in the organization knew only too well that such a resolution would mean that Morton, by virtue of his position, would be the strongest single influence in the state. They would wreck the party before letting that come to pass.

If we can judge from the account of the meeting in the Arbor Lodge Journal, Morton was not downcast over the result. He wrote: ". . . The proposition, fortunately for me, to have the State Democratic Committee of Nebraska control federal patronage within the state is voted down. It saves me from a great deal of trouble and places in political peril those who voted it down. They will now be held responsible for all *unsatisfactory* appointments and for all *disappointments* too among those seeking office. I never before sought to appear defeated and (in spite of my wishes) came near (within three votes) of seeming victorious. Victory would have been defeat. Defeat is victory." ²²

After his program had been rejected by the committee, Morton began to do what he could, as an individual, to secure such appointments as he thought in the best interest of the party and the people. Together with his friends in the state, he wrote letters and signed petitions in great number. He felt that his most influential friends in Washington were the Secretary of State, Thomas F. Bayard, and the Postmaster General, William F. Vilas. Both men seemed disposed to do what they could in regard to the Nebraska situation.

²¹ Morton to Brown, March 5, 1885.

²² March 19, 1885.

Bayard's department had no appointments within the state, but he promised that he would discuss the general situation with the President, though he warned Morton that "in the 'slack water' between the political currents much that is perplexing & annoying must be expected."²³ Vilas, of course, was in a real position to aid anyone who wished to have a hand in federal patronage, in Nebraska or any other state. He seems to have been disposed not only to accept advice from Morton, but also to solicit it, and several important post office appointments, notably those of Albert Watkins in Lincoln and Donald MacCuaig in Nebraska City, came as a direct result of such solicitation.

Meanwhile, Morton's friends became increasingly impatient over the progress of their cause. Judging from the letters that poured in upon him, they seemed to feel that all would be satisfactory, if only he would make a trip to Washington and discuss the situation personally with the men who were to make the appointments. Morton resisted this pressure as long as he could. He wrote Nat Smails, a particularly impatient adherent from Fremont: "What shall I now do to retain your esteem? You seem unwilling to accept my views as to decent political methods and rather intimate that a movement on Washington would be a good thing. But who has made anything by such expeditions? Calhoun²⁴ is now there and our genial Doctor is *enroute*, I am told, for the same Mecca. This makes pilgrimage number 4 or 5 and what are the results?"²⁵

In an effort to set another person at ease, he wrote: "... Politically I know that when Nebraska is reached we will all have a hearing and that no appointments will be made to spite anybody. There is nothing to be gained by pilgrimages to Washington nor by epistolary importunity. . . . I hear from Washington enough to make me serene and confident that no injustice will win there."²⁶

He appreciated the anxiety with which his friends urged him to go to Washington, and was not irritated by it, but rather flattered. However, the results of such a journey were, in his judgment,

²³ T. F. Bayard to Morton, May 18, 1885.

²⁴ S. H. Calhoun of Nebraska City, a Democrat with whom Morton had seldom agreed, and who had always been a leader in the anti-Morton faction of the party. He was seeking the post of collector of internal revenue at the port of Omaha, a quest in which much to Morton's disgust, he was successful.

²⁵ Morton to Smails, May 22, 1885.

²⁶ Morton to Tower, May 26, 1885.

"hyper-estimated." Moreover, he professed doubt in his ability to do much by personal association in the capital city: "In such a crowd of mendicants one un-used to begging, like myself, could stand no show for alms. It is never judicious to compete with experts in any game; and it is especially unsafe to enter the competitive struggle of sycophants in their endeavor to secure political favors."²⁷

Finally, however, at the end of September, Morton decided to make the distasteful journey. He was in the capital only three days, but he seemed pleased with the results of his work. On the morning of his arrival, he was taken to the White House by the Commissioner of Agriculture. There he found Secretary Bayard, who "seemed glad" to see him, and introduced him to the President, "very satisfactorily." One of his three evenings was spent at the home of Secretary Bayard, another with Secretary of the Interior Lamar. Postmaster General Vilas was "very cordial and exceedingly satisfying—looking to the future." Speaking generally of his visit, he said: "Do not know that . . . [it] will do any good but console myself it will do no harm. Thus far I have talked only in general terms and not for or against specific appointments. The other gentlemen ask for information of affairs in our state and I truthfully give it *without* so far, even naming M. & B."²⁸ But they evidently have mentioned me here as I am better known and possibly better esteemed than I should have been without their virulent and blatant antagonism. . . ."²⁹

Dr. Miller's "virulent and blatant antagonism" was not confined to Washington. All during the summer and early fall the *Omaha Herald* was full of it. Despite all his unfavorable publicity, Morton remained undisturbed. To James E. North, who was trying to be friendly with both men, he wrote that after thirty years in Nebraska he ought to be "broken down, and trampled under foot, if my reputation for truth, honor and courage is such a frail and fragile myth that a few editorials . . . can obliterate it."³⁰

The crowning example of the Doctor's antagonism was a long editorial purporting to paint a "pen picture" of J. Sterling Morton.

²⁷ Morton to Brown, June 21, 1885.

²⁸ George L. Miller and James E. Boyd.

²⁹ Morton to Brown, October 1, 1885. The report of Morton's Washington trip is taken from this letter and from one to Brown dated October 3, 1885.

³⁰ Morton to North, April 15, 1885.

Miller's other criticism of Morton had been confined to political questions, but in the "pen picture" he rambled on for more than a column on Morton's personal characteristics. He pronounced Morton "a man of a certain kind of brilliancy and talents . . . and many shining qualities, most of them more shining than solid." He declared his subject to be "constitutionally incapacitated for wise political leadership . . . extremely impressionable . . . more often swayed by the foolish than influenced by the wise . . . incapable of gratitude . . . sometimes a beautiful, but never a strong writer . . . a professional phrase monger . . . too lazy in his natural bent to enjoy good health, but . . . capable of the most energetic effort under any pressure that appeals to his personal vanity or political ambition. . . ." ³¹

It was not a pleasant picture. It was sharp and hard, and coming from the source it did, probably cut Morton deeper and hurt him more than any other newspaper attack, no matter how slanderous, had ever done. Yet Morton was always quite cheerful when referring to the "portrait." The following, to Charles H. Brown, is typical:

. . . "The good Doctor" as my biographer is even more entertaining this morning than usual. It is consistent that for thirty years he should have steadfastly—so far as I could see—adhered to entirely opposite opinions relative to a character he now asserts he has always known to be quite despicable. . . . ³²

Squabbles between the party's two ranking members served to heighten the interest manifest in the forthcoming state convention, called to meet at Lincoln, September 15. It was an off year, and there was little interest in candidates or platforms. The convention was looked upon as important because everywhere it was felt that it would furnish a test of strength between the Morton and the Miller-Boyd factions of the party.

When the convention assembled, it was generally believed that Boyd and Miller held the upper hand, and would be able to control the group, even to the extent of ousting Morton as chairman of the State Central Committee. According to Morton, their pre-convention strength resulted from "promises of post offices and of a

³¹ *Omaha Herald*, September 5, 1885.

³² Morton to Brown, September 5, 1885.

general assortment of federal patronage . . . made by the Boyd-Miller gang at the primaries. . . ."³³

For several days prior to the convention, the *Herald* and other papers were full of interviews, articles, and editorials predicting Morton's political demise. When Crites, of Cass County, the nominee of the Boyd-Miller caucus, was elected chairman of the convention, Morton's antagonists were even more sure of themselves. During a short recess following the transaction of the routine business of the convention, Robert Patrick, one of Boyd's lieutenants, jumped to a chair and shouted, "All those who voted for Crites are requested to step into the adjoining room and hold a caucus."³⁴ Miller and Boyd evidently thought that all those who had voted for their candidate for chairman were in sympathy with them and against Morton. In this they appear to have been mistaken. According to Charles H. Brown, Crites had received a large number of votes because the Morton candidate, Hazlett, had refused, until the last minute, to allow his name to be used. In any event, when the proposition was made to depose Morton from the chairmanship, "the friends of Mr. Morton stood up, and denounced the movement, repudiated such leadership, and retired, leaving Boyd who was present directing the revolutionary plot, and his henchmen, by themselves, an insignificant minority of the representatives of the democracy of the State."³⁵

Following this, the convention appeared to go entirely Morton's way, and through some skillful work, what began as a defeat was turned into what not only his friends, but also outsiders considered an overwhelming victory.

The Boyd faction, hoping in some way to discredit Morton, even after failing to oust him from the chairmanship, had one of its members present a resolution declaring that it was "no part of the duty of the state central committee, as such, to dictate or control federal appointments, but that each member of the democratic central committee should stand upon the same footing as any other democrat in the state."³⁶

³³ Morton to Bayard, October 18, 1885.

³⁴ Brown to Bayard, October 30, 1885.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cf. *Nebraska State Journal*, October 16, 1885.

Morton, to the surprise of everyone, immediately jumped to his feet and moved that the resolution be unanimously adopted. The Boyd men were taken completely off guard. Their discomfiture was increased, when, after a speech by the leaders of the opposing factions, Morton and Boyd, it was evident that the party's prime orator was still J. Sterling Morton. Charles H. Brown, reporting the convention to Thomas F. Bayard, declared: "The delegates came to that Convention three to one in favor of Morton, and went away five to one in his favor. The reason for this is two-fold: First, Morton is a host in himself, and attracts recognition, commands influence. Second, he represents the democracy of this State; he is with them, and they are for him." ³⁷

The *Omaha Republican*, commenting on its opponents' difficulties, concluded: "Mr. Morton is not dead politically, by any means. If the treatment he received at the convention be evidence of his standing throughout the state, he has a popularity which both Boyd and Miller cannot afford to underrate. . . ." ³⁸

The patronage struggle continued. With the assembling of Congress in December, the interested persons again moved on Washington. Dr. Miller was there, reporting his progress frequently through the columns of the *Herald*. Morton was there for almost four months; part of that time Charles H. Brown was with him. The eternal slowness of Washington is illustrated in the lack of accomplishment by either Miller or Morton. Now and then a postmaster was appointed, occasionally some other federal official; but Cleveland appeared to be moving with a deliberateness that bordered on procrastination.

Occasionally a Boyd-Miller man would be favored; occasionally a Morton adherent. Regarding his defeats, Morton was unperturbed. He wrote to Brown, after the latter had returned to Omaha: "Who cares who they [Miller and Boyd] get appointments for, if they name only honest decent Democrats; and who is harmed besides the Democratic party & the public service when they make mistakes? Boyd & Miller are harmed and they have my sympathy. If it was in my power I would give them a better judgment and imbue them with more patriotism. . . ." ³⁹

³⁷ Brown to Bayard, October 30, 1885.

³⁸ October 20, 1885.

³⁹ Morton to Brown, February 9, 1886.

Morton soon became "weary of this waste of money, time and patience," but declared he would stay for a while longer.⁴⁰ In a letter to his son Paul, describing a "little dinner" he had given at Chamberlain's to Secretary of Interior Lamar, and Congressmen Bright and MacDonald, he wrote: "Affairs here sailing smoothly and in P.O. Dept. have scored several 'scoops' during the week. But I would rather be at Arbor Lodge with the pictures and memories of your Dear Mother and her children."⁴¹

Morton was not in Washington solely in the interest of the patronage in Nebraska, and it is probable that he would not have felt able to remain as long as he did, had he been.

A bill designed to regulate interstate commerce was being agitated, and while the officials of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad do not appear to have had much hope of staving off such legislation, they took advantage of Morton's presence in the capital on political business to retain him to keep an eye on the proceedings and do what he could to slow up the action or modify its results in any way that would be favorable to the railroads. There appears to have been little he could do, and virtually no record of what he attempted has been preserved. The resignation of at least one high railroad official to federal regulation is expressed in a letter from Charles E. Perkins:

. . . I see that Cullom has made his report, and thinks national legislation on railroads is a necessity. I fancy that Congress will agree with him, and that we shall get it accordingly. It is a pity that modern Democrats have drifted so far away from the doctrine of local self-government; which the distinguished founders of the party considered to be essential to the preservation of the republic. . . . When the Democrats of the South attempted to carry local self-government to the extreme of secession, they were very properly prevented, but it ought not to follow from this that everything should be centered in the hands of Congress. . . .⁴²

Morton remained in Washington until the middle of April. Such success as he enjoyed centered in a number of favorable post office appointments and the ground work he hoped he had laid for the more important appointments which were yet to be made. Having thus done all that he thought he could for the time being, he de-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, February 16, 1886.

⁴¹ Morton to Paul Morton, February 27, 1886.

⁴² Perkins to Morton, January 20, 1886.

cided to remove himself entirely from the scene of conflict by indulging a long-felt desire to visit Europe. Ostensibly, his reason for making the trip was to attend the annual dinner of the Cobden Club, of which he had been elected an honorary member in recognition of his efforts on behalf of free trade.

"After that event," he wrote a friend, "without aim, I shall drift about, and go—I know not whither—sightseeing and endeavoring to—in my loneliness—be as contented as fate will permit." ⁴³

The Cobden Club dinner was cancelled. Morton's disappointment was "large-sized" but he did not propose to allow the cancellation to spoil his trip, or even the evening on which the dinner was scheduled. He wrote to his sister Emma: "I alone held a meeting at the appointed hour and sat down *en masse* at 6 o'clock P.M. to a straight fish dinner. It consisted of salmon, soles, eels, white-bait and shrimps with possibly polly wogs. Silently—in full dress—I devoured all this marine medley until my views of the fisheries question were completely satisfied. To prevent sad sequences I drowned the entire aquarium in an infusion of champagne and followed that with a tracer of brandy." ⁴⁴

The trip was an idle, pleasant way of spending the summer, though it was made lonely by the wish that Caroline, too, might have been along. Like all good tourists, he sought to make his journey educational as well as pleasurable, and faithfully followed his guide books. The visit to England particularly confirmed his views on the tariff. He wrote to Charles H. Brown that England, inspired by the American protective system, was making herself, through her colonies and India, entirely self-sustaining, "and particularly independent of the United States." ⁴⁵ Later he observed: ". . . We are not commercially anything compared to what we would and could be with unfettered commerce; liberty to sell and to buy wherever individual interest or caprice may suggest. We are not wise in saying by our Protective Tariff: 'We will trade with ourselves, within ourselves, for ourselves, by ourselves and thus get rich, prosperous and powerful.' . . ." ⁴⁶

⁴³ Morton to Brown, June 16, 1886.

⁴⁴ Morton to Emma Morton, July 4, 1886.

⁴⁵ Morton to Brown, July 15, 1886.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, August 21, 1886.

While Morton sojourned in Europe, his enemies in Nebraska were not idle. Miller and Boyd, in the absence of Morton, had completely dominated the state convention held at Hastings, and had nominated a ticket composed solely of their supporters. Morton's friends railed at it as "nondescript,"⁴⁷ and "the weakest ever nominated," declaring it to have been named, "not to cut down republican majorities but rather to heap some honors upon their trusted lieutenants and by getting them 'endorsed' secure some vantage ground for federal patronage. . . ." ⁴⁸

Miller and Boyd were getting the patronage well into their hands, too. Just before the convention, S. H. Calhoun, one of Morton's long-time political enemies, was nominated for one of the most important federal positions in Nebraska, that of collector of internal revenue at the port of Omaha. This appointment Morton declared to be "a misfortune to Democracy in the State of Nebraska."⁴⁹ Immediately he set about trying to block its confirmation, but was unsuccessful. Calhoun was confirmed, as were all other Miller and Boyd men appointed to federal positions.

The Morton Democrats in the state were in virtual rout. The control over the party gained by Miller and Boyd in the convention was intensified by the appointment of many of their friends to public office. Miller's influence with Secretary of the Treasury Manning appeared to outweigh all other considerations.

With any control whatsoever over the patronage snatched from his hand, and given to those whom he regarded as factionists and disrupters of the party, Morton began to think of his opposition to Cleveland at the national convention in 1884, and because of the turn of affairs, to feel that he had been wise in supporting Thomas F. Bayard to the end.

In the early part of 1887, his letters begin to show an increasing hostility toward the President. In March, he wrote to A. J. Sawyer, who had been refused the appointment of United States District Attorney for Nebraska: ". . . every month I grow prouder and prouder of my position regarding candidates for nomination at the Chicago Convention in 1884, and the hope wells up that I may attend the

⁴⁷ Smails to Morton, October 10, 1886.

⁴⁸ A. J. Sawyer to Morton, October 10, 1886.

⁴⁹ Morton to Charles H. Brown, October 8, 1886.

next one and orally reaffirm my views then and there. We are New Yorked to disgrace, and death; and mugwumped to a state of idiocy. The President has a big belly. His brains are not proportioned to it." ⁵⁰

Even the President's great tariff message of December failed to stir any admiration for him in Morton's breast. With all other free traders, he was gratified that the tariff was at last to be the central issue of a national campaign; yet for the President who had made it so, he had only criticism. His views were expressed in a letter written from Maine, whither at the request of the National Committee he had gone in the summer of 1888 to speak on behalf of Cleveland's re-election:

Had Cleveland's Tariff reform message been dated Dec 86 instead of 87 we should win victory everywhere. The People would have become educated before this time, but the term of school has been too short for teaching economics to 60,000,000 people. Therefore we may fail to carry New York and some other needed states and so be defeated. . . . But that will not discourage me nor cause me to cease defending commerce from the assaults of slavery which would give all commerce shackled into the hands of Trusts and Monopolies. . . .⁵¹

November's Democratic rout Morton laid at the feet of the President: "He taught economics a year too early or a year too late. His appointments of the Pritchett-Calhoun type are all over the U. S. and they do not enthuse the masses of Democracy." ⁵²

Morton's expressions of disgust with President Cleveland were by no means confined to private correspondence. Regardless of how extreme his opinions, Morton never was ashamed of them, nor afraid to take the consequences of holding them. He gave interviews freely in condemnation of the party's standard bearer. Probably the most savage was one given to the *New York Star* shortly after the election while Morton was in the city to attend a dinner of the Reform Club. When asked, "as one of the most conspicuous leaders of the Democracy in the Northwest," regarding the party's future and the significance of the late defeat, Morton replied:

I see no reason to be discouraged. We are fortunate in getting rid of Cleveland, who, I think, should after the 4th of March, unite with Hayes in the chicken business. I consider them well matched . . . we fought for a great principle, and

⁵⁰ Morton to Sawyer, March 27, 1887.

⁵¹ Morton to Charles H. Brown, September 3, 1888.

⁵² *Ibid.*, November 22, 1888.

Cleveland was simply an unpleasant incident in the campaign. I stumped Maine and then returned home, and we increased the Democratic vote in my district over 2,000; but it was not for Mr. Cleveland I worked, for I regarded him as one of the most unfit men for President who ever occupied the position. He is weak and vain, and thought himself a man of destiny. He was a big man among a few ward statesmen in Buffalo, and this led him into the belief that he was a very big man among the statesmen of the country. There is hardly a leading Democrat in the country whom he has not ill-treated. He has refused to be guided by their advice, and if he took any it was from persons with no standing in the party. As far as he is concerned we ought to be thankful that we had only four years instead of eight of him. . . .⁵³

Any man holding such an opinion of President Cleveland clearly was out of harmony with the Democracy of the nation. Morton was out of harmony with the Democracy of his state as well. In 1888 he had been sent to the St. Louis convention, but was completely overshadowed in the delegation by the Miller-Boyd element of the party. As he later wrote to a friend: ". . . at St. Louis I was the troops, and all the other members of the Delegation the officers."⁵⁴ That same year he had been unexpectedly nominated for Congress in his district. He had accepted candidacy, "for the sake of tariff reduction and sound political economy and not with the hope or desire for mere office as office,"⁵⁵ and had made an active campaign, but, as usual, had been badly beaten.

Until 1892, however, the two instances mentioned above were the only periods of really active participation in the Democracy's affairs after he lost control during the patronage scramble. He maintained a lively interest in the party, but was content—or forced—to remain a mere onlooker. It did not disturb him. He devoted himself to the cause of tariff reform in letters, papers, and speeches all over the country. He spent each winter in Washington as an attorney for various Chicago corporations, thus helping to refill a pocketbook that had borne more than its share of Democratic expenses during the past eight years. Arbor Lodge and Nebraska City also commanded much attention. He gave a tract of land to the city for use as a park. His letterbooks are filled with requests to this or that company or commercial friend to locate in the city, or to improve industries already established. He made constant improvements

⁵³ *New York Star*, January 27, 1889.

⁵⁴ Morton to Thomas Miller, June 11, 1888.

⁵⁵ Arbor Lodge Journal, September 27, 1888.

at Arbor Lodge. This was now the home of his sister Emma and his mother until her death in 1890. One addition which came to demand much time and money was the construction of an artificial lake, named, in honor of his four sons, "Jopamaca." It was stocked with fish and provided with a boat and boathouse; but the earthen dam periodically went out and the fish with it. If we can judge from Morton's journal, the problem of dam building was much more important than could have been any one connected with politics.

Meanwhile, the Democrats in the state appeared to be getting along rather well without their ancient champion. In 1890, James E. Boyd was nominated for governor, and was elected. For the first time in the history of Nebraska, a Democrat headed its government. Morton was not exactly exuberant over the election, though he rejoiced in the general Democratic victory that accompanied it. He was prepared to forget old grievances, and while he honestly believed that the new Governor would have little need of his help, he wrote to Dr. Miller that he was "ready and willing in all ways" to do his part toward sustaining the new administration.⁵⁶ He also became quite friendly again with his erstwhile portrait painter. Dr. Miller had gone out of the newspaper business, and with Morton temporarily out of active politics also, the two men had allowed their animosity to cool and once again had resumed their broken correspondence.

In Morton's eyes, the most hopeful aspect of the Democratic victory in Nebraska was the election to Congress of a brilliant young lawyer from Lincoln named William Jennings Bryan. When Bryan had removed to Nebraska from Illinois in 1887, he had come bearing a letter of introduction to J. Sterling Morton. He was a frequent visitor at Arbor Lodge. After the first visit Morton frankly stated that he liked him.⁵⁷ When in 1888 Bryan came to Nebraska City to speak on behalf of his (Morton's) election to Congress, Morton wrote in his journal: "Bryan . . . is a remarkably promising man. He has gifts. He will be, with good habits and right directions, a benefactor to good government."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Morton to Miller, November 7, 1890.

⁵⁷ Arbor Lodge Journal, May 30, 1888.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1888.

Upon the young man's nomination for Congress in 1890, in reply to Dr. Miller's query: "Who the hell is Bryan?" Morton wrote, "Mr. Bryan is able, eloquent and of most pure and untainted character. His election, which I consider quite probable, will do honor to every citizen in this District. And to elect him I am doing all that it is in my power to do."⁵⁹

Morton watched Bryan's first two years in Congress with mounting doubt and apprehension. The young man did not seem to possess those needful "right directions." Yet there was no break between the two men, possibly because Morton considered himself merely an observer, and was inclined to be moderate in his judgment of men, possibly because Bryan devoted much of his splendid talent to the cause of tariff reform. Once an active participant again, however, no such moderation was manifest. Morton and Bryan ran on the same ticket in 1892. It was the beginning of the biggest fight of Morton's life.

⁵⁹ Morton to Miller, August 20, 1890.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

FIRST BLOWS ON THE SILVER ISSUE

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1892 revealed a confusion of political conflict. Numerous interests had been taking shape during two decades, and they were not clearly politically defined even at the end of the century. The struggle was complex, both in its manifestations and the forces out of which it developed. It was a sectional battle, with the East against the West and South; it was a class struggle, with the rich against the poor, the creditor against the debtor; it was a struggle of temperament, with the conservative against the radical. The diverse interests could not find adequate expression in the two old political parties.

The forces from which the struggle sprang had their industrial aspect, but in the main they were agrarian; just as probably the most important aspect of the controversy itself was that between the aggressively industrial and money-lending East and the predominantly agricultural and money-borrowing South and West.

Farmers in both the South and West had long protested the unprofitableness of their business. Year in and year out, they toiled, from sunrise to sunset, their wives and children often in the fields with them; yet they had little to show for their efforts besides a meagre existence and the mortgage. The farmers gave many reasons for their unfortunate condition: the protective tariff, a defective circulating medium, trusts, speculation in farm products, greedy

middlemen, exorbitant transportation rates, the "tribute" which they were forced to pay the moneylenders of the East.¹

Whatever the causes of their plight, the farmers were ripe for the acceptance of panaceas for their relief. Independent parties, voicing the grievances and offering the solutions of minor groups, came and went from the early Seventies onward. The Granger Movement, though ostensibly nonpolitical, was basically an expression of agricultural discontent.² Occasionally, a group such as the Anti-Monopolists, the Greenbackers, or the Union Labor Party would exert influence in a campaign or two, only to fall away, unable to win adherents enough to maintain a permanent and effective organization. An important reason for the ineffectiveness of the organization of discontent was that the discontented could find no single, popular issue around which their opinion might coalesce. Virtually all of them opposed the protective tariff; yet it was not an issue in which it was possible to enlist a vigorous, sustained, popular interest; and if it had been, the men who dominated the tariff reform movement—men like Morrison, Morton, Wells, Sumner, and Perry—were essentially out of touch and out of sympathy with the broad spirit of agrarian revolt. It took the silver miners to give the farmers a real, a vital, and throbbing issue.

The miners—or rather, the mine operators—apprehensive of the falling price of silver, declared to the worried and confused farmers that the cause of their trouble could be found in the "secret demonetization" of silver by Europeans and Easterners to serve the ends of the Money Power. It was pointed out to the farmers that because of the "demonetization" of silver, the volume of the circulating medium was so reduced that the amount which remained was constantly increasing in value; and the Eastern moneylenders profited, because as the purchasing power of money increased, payment of debts required more goods and services than the debt represented at the time it was contracted. The solution of the problem was to be found in the free and unlimited coinage of silver, thereby increasing the amount of money in circulation, and making it easier for the farmer to pay his debts.³

¹ Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War* (Iowa City, 1916), 222.

² See pp. 188–189.

³ Haynes, *op. cit.*, 223–224.

The proposition was attractive. One did not need to understand the intricacies of finance to appreciate its allurements—indeed, the less one understood of the niceties of the financial relation, the more voluptuous did the silver goddess appear. The farmers were easily seduced.

In 1889 a national silver conference was held in St. Louis. A glance at the list of delegates shows many names prominent in the growing organization of agricultural discontent. The next year a demand for the free coinage of silver appeared in the political platforms of various Western states. In Nebraska, William Jennings Bryan, running for Congress, wrote a free coinage plank into the Democratic state platform. Silver was not an issue in Bryan's campaign of 1890, however, for both he and his opponent, W. J. Connell, held the same views.⁴ The newly organized People's Party in Nebraska not only favored free silver, but advocated the expansion of the circulating medium until it should reach \$50 per person.⁵

By the opening of the campaign of 1892 the silver question loomed large, though it was by no means the only issue of the campaign, or even the foremost. In the Populist convention at Omaha which nominated General James B. Weaver of Iowa as the People's candidate for President, the hurrahs that greeted the time-worn demands on the railroad and land questions exceeded the applause given the free silver plank.⁶

During the campaign, however, the silver issue was to grow into one of complete dominance.

Even though the issue of the great struggle had not been precisely stated at the beginning of the campaign of 1892, the sectional lines of battle were being drawn. Nothing indicated this more surely than the renomination of Grover Cleveland by the Democratic Party. The Easterners who rallied around the former President early in the year were conscious of the threat arising out of the West. The clouds foretold the coming storm. Cleveland was looked upon as a rock that would stand fast no matter how great the tempest. In addition,

⁴ W. J. Bryan, *The First Battle* (Chicago, n.d.), 71.

⁵ Works Progress Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940* (1940), 149.

⁶ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis, 1931), 231. The official name of the party was "The People's Independent Party." Both its members and opponents used "Populist" and not uncommonly reduced it to "Pop."

Cleveland still held the reformers. Tariff reform and administrative honesty still figured strongly in the campaign, but added to them was the principle of unyielding conservatism in all that affected finance and business.⁷

Where did J. Sterling Morton stand in face of the impending struggle? At first—typically—he stood alone.

It was certain that he had little in common with the men who were forming the People's Party; rather, he had been identified in the Populist mind as an example in their midst of all that they were fighting. A biographer of William Jennings Bryan has a description of Morton that any Populist would have praised: "A copperhead as reactionary as any who managed to survive Reconstruction days, a free trader of the Cobden Club, an aristocrat and a suave public speaker, the Hon. J. Sterling Morton was in appearance and cast of mind as completely the Southern gentleman of the days before the war as only one born in New York and raised in Michigan knew how to be."⁸

Anathema to the Populists, and finding them equally distasteful, Morton was also unable to develop much enthusiasm for the conservative leadership of the Democratic Party, either in the nation or Nebraska. His unfavorable opinion of President Cleveland was known of all men who read the political press; and it was but slowly that his opinion changed. Yet he saw that unless the party could unite on somebody, its cause was hopelessly lost. For that reason he wrote Dr. Miller that he had decided to "surrender all personal predilections from a nominee for the Presidency down to a candidate for constable." He added:

Therefore I am not opposing (and it would be futile to do so) the renomination of Cleveland at all. He might carry New York in 1892 though in 1888 he did not do so. He might arouse the zeal of the intense working Democrats everywhere though in 1888 he did not seem to do so. But as I shall never again be a delegate to a Democratic National Convention my opinions and desires as to a Presidential Candidate are unimportant, though when called upon—if I ever am—it will be a pleasure to me as in the Past to do all in my power to advance and

⁷ Nevins, *op. cit.*, 480-481.

⁸ Paxton Hibben, *The Peerless Leader, William Jennings Bryan* (New York, n.d.), 115-116.

exalt the Democratic standard in the interests of good government, and in antagonism to that heresy which would use the power to tax for other than a public purpose. . . .⁹

Morton did not oppose the renomination of President Cleveland, yet even after the campaign had begun, the belief that Morton was unenthusiastic over his candidacy is evident in such letters as the following from E. Ellery Anderson of the New York Reform Club: ". . . I have not the slightest doubt that the great experience in public matters which Mr. Cleveland has passed through, both while President and during the past four years, will enable him to discharge the delicate duties of selecting satisfactory officeholders, so as to produce on the whole better results than during his former term." ¹⁰

In Nebraska, the conservative element of the Democratic Party was in the hands of Governor James E. Boyd. Morton, on the whole, found no fault with Boyd's economic and political views, but personal differences kept the two men from any degree of cooperation.

It was not long, however, before Morton began to realize that either he must compose his differences and go to work with somebody, or else retire from active political life. Despite all declarations of desire, he would never have been able to abandon politics. The rising importance of silver, too, brought him to the conclusion that he must get busy or get out. So Morton kindled his old fire on behalf of conservatism.

Although always, with one exception, a champion of "sound money," Morton in 1890 evidently had not considered the silver question a vital issue, for he had favored the election of his young friend Bryan on a platform declaring for free coinage. By the next year, however, he was alive to the dangers of free coinage, and as a preliminary to an active campaign began sending letters on the silver question out from Arbor Lodge to newspapers all over the West. The letters served as a reminder that Morton was still in the state and still interested in public questions. Perhaps they helped in a small way to counteract the doctrines of "Silver Dick" Bland, preached so fervently by his zealous apostles on the prairie.

⁹ Morton to Miller, November 21, 1890.

¹⁰ E. Ellery Anderson to Morton, August 2, 1882.

Morton argued that the farmer, more than anyone else, should oppose the cheapening of money, because after that had happened "the foreigner and the miser" would get the good money and the farmer would get only the cheap money for his corn, and wheat, and hogs.¹¹

Aside from his opposition to free coinage itself, Morton's early interest in the silver question was engendered by a fear that it would overshadow the tariff if the silver men were allowed to have their way.¹² There was reason for such a fear, for though he soon was to change his views, one of the most forthright of all the prophets of the silver goddess in the early Nineties was William McKinley, a congressman from Ohio. The name McKinley was not one held dear by tariff reformers.

As 1892 approached, Morton felt increasingly that, to save the future for tariff reform, the silver question must definitely be settled during the campaign of that year. To keep the tariff before the public, in spite of silver, he called unlimited free coinage, "the domestic phase of protection, [which] would give . . . fiat bounty on each dollar's worth of silver the Bonanza men can produce."¹³ To Congressman Bryan, whom he had not yet given up as completely lost, he sent the warning, "Free Coinage beckons Democracy to disaster in 1892."¹⁴

Congressman Bryan, however, was not at all sure that free silver meant disaster. In fact, it might mean just the opposite. It might prove a plank on which to get the votes of a few of those irascible Populists, and serve to weaken their third-party predilections. Bryan came to the state convention called to choose delegates to the national convention, shouting for free silver, and for Horace Boies, of Iowa, for President. He was a member of the platform committee, and when that group refused to adopt a declaration in favor of free silver, he took his fight to the floor of the convention. He made a long speech in support of his silver plank. It was the first time a general assemblage of the Democrats of the state had got a taste of his eloquence. So swept off their feet were they that the Congress-

¹¹ Morton Scrapbooks.

¹² *New York Times*, March 5, 1891.

¹³ Morton to Brown, March 16, 1891.

¹⁴ Morton to Bryan, September 28, 1891.

man's resolution came within a shade of passing, and the group almost went on record in favor of Horace Boies for the presidency.¹⁵

Four months later, when the state nominating convention met, the conservatives, bolstered by the renomination of Grover Cleveland, were hopeful of maintaining their control of the party in Nebraska. They were not unaware of the presence or influence of Congressman Bryan, but they hoped to keep that able and energetic member of the party under control by persuading him to concentrate his energies upon what had been his specialty—the tariff. Above the stage, front and center, in Funke's Opera House in Lincoln, seat of the convention, was a huge picture of Congressman Bryan; on either side were the stern visages of Grover Cleveland and Adlai Stevenson. Underneath, a long streamer bearing the words, in recognition of Bryan's efforts on behalf of tariff reform: "The people of Nebraska find their champion here, not in Ohio."¹⁶ In order that the Congressman might be further impressed with the fact that it was his stand on the tariff that the home folks appreciated, he was asked to deliver the main speech of the convention—on tariff reform.

With Bryan temporarily disposed of, the conservatives' next problem was the gubernatorial nomination. Governor Boyd, who had brought the party victory for the first time in the history of the state, had passed a stormy term, and his desire for public office had been fully satisfied.¹⁷

Largely because he had vetoed the highly popular Newberry Bill prescribing maximum freight rates, the Governor had lost much of his standing with the rank and file of party members.¹⁸ Yet if there was to be any hope of victory, the strongest possible man must be named. The Republicans had nominated Lorenzo Crounse, judge and former congressman, and one of the ablest men in the party. The Populists named General C. H. Van Wyck, a former United States Senator, a potent vote-getter who had been a Republican, then an Independent, and since the organization of the People's Party, a

¹⁵ *Omaha World-Herald*, April 15, 1892; Morton-Watkins, III:240.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, August 31, 1892.

¹⁷ Cf. Miller to Morton, April 17, 1892.

¹⁸ Morton-Watkins, III:242.

Populist.¹⁹ Moreover, by the conservatives Van Wyck was the most cordially hated man in the state.

With Boyd neither available nor desirable, there was only one possible choice—Morton.

Morton—as always—was not officially a candidate, and would do nothing that might lay him open to the charge of seeking the office. Nevertheless, he found it convenient to accept an invitation to visit his good friends in Lincoln, the Andrew Jackson Sawyers, just at the time the convention was scheduled to meet.

On the eve of the convention, a delegation of political friends called upon him at the Sawyer home to urge him to accept the Democratic nomination for governor. He said to them: "I am not a candidate. I might accept the candidature as a duty if it were *unanimously* tendered me. But I would not take it with one dissenting voice in the convention."²⁰

Morton's friends in the party were quite willing to do all that was necessary to bring about the unanimous support demanded by their proposed candidate. They were quite sanguine of Cleveland's election, and they thought that in addition to keeping the party firmly conservative, Morton's nomination would strengthen his position regarding the federal patronage, and perhaps make it possible, during the second administration, for the Morton men to control the distribution of the federal spoils.²¹ They had not forgotten their failures during the first Cleveland Administration.²²

There had for some time been fear among the conservatives that Congressman Bryan, in addition to espousing free silver, might overthrow their plans either by attempting to push the party into fusion

¹⁹ Marie U. Harmer, "The Life of Charles H. Van Wyck" (Ms. in University of Nebraska Library), 89.

²⁰ Arbor Lodge Journal, August 29, 1892. Albert Watkins, some years later, wrote the following concerning Morton's attitude toward the nomination: "Just before the convention was called to order, J. Sterling Morton said to the present writer that he was in doubt as to the expediency of accepting the nomination, but that he would refer the question to five of his tried friends, namely Charles H. Brown, Charles B. Rustin, Albert Watkins, Andrew J. Sawyer, and Howard J. Whitmore. Almost as a matter of course four of these gentlemen advised Mr. Morton to accept the nomination; but the writer mildly discouraged acceptance on the ground that in recent years Mr. Morton had made several strong runs for congress and for the governorship, that besides the old factional trouble there was a new and acute division of the party on the money question, so that it might be better for him to let well enough alone."—Morton-Watkins, III:243n.

²¹ Morton-Watkins, III:242.

²² See p. 328.

with the Populists and the support of Van Wyck, or to get the nomination for himself. The decorations, the place on the program, and support for renomination to Congress probably had their effect; for the Congressman acquiesced in the nomination of Morton, and rode to the convention in the same carriage with the man who had given him his start in state politics.²³

In the convention hall, the conservative machine clicked with a smoothness unknown since before the Miller-Morton feud. After nominations had been declared in order, the names of Frank P. Ireland of Nebraska City, and S. M. Wolbach of Grand Island were put forward, but when Charles H. Brown of Omaha nominated Morton, the ensuing applause made it clear that the Democrats of Nebraska wanted another run under the leadership of the old war horse who periodically ever since 1866 had led them in gallant but forlorn hopes. Wolbach's name was withdrawn even before Morton's was mentioned. As one county after another joined in the uproarious seconding of Morton, Ireland's name also was withdrawn, and "Connie" Gallagher, one of Boyd's Omaha henchmen, moved that Morton's nomination be made unanimous and by acclamation.

Amidst the wildest applause Morton was escorted to the platform. He accepted the nomination "against his own convenience and inclination." But he accepted. And once again he whipped the Democracy into enthusiasm for the campaign, denouncing the Republicans, rotten government, the protectionists, the Populists, and Van Wyck.²⁴ It was a great speech. Added to Congressman Bryan's magnificent effort on the tariff, it proved to the Democracy that though they might be short on numbers, they definitely were long on oratory. Morton and Bryan—the old and the young, the conservative and the radical—each spell-binding the convention, seemingly in perfect harmony—it was a spectacle that augured well for the future, a spectacle that must have warmed the cockles of the coldest Democratic heart.

Morton was still under the spell of the convention when he returned home. He wrote in his diary, "possibly I can and shall be elected. . . ." ²⁵

²³ Hibben, *op. cit.*, 142.

²⁴ *Omaha World-Herald*, August 31, 1892.

²⁵ *Arbor Lodge Journal*, August 30, 1892.

The larger papers of the state received Morton's nomination quite favorably. The *Omaha World-Herald*, at that time attempting to be nonpartisan, called him "one of the most distinguished men of the west . . . able and brilliant . . . original and cultured . . . an effective campaigner and . . . a man possessing in the fullest degree the courage of his convictions." It was that paper's opinion that all three parties had put forward their best men.²⁶ The *Bee* said Morton was "one of the ablest democrats in the country and an excellent representative of the present attitude of the democratic party on the tariff. . . ." ²⁷

The campaign was not slow in getting under way. The Democratic State Committee, seemingly recognizing along with the *World-Herald* and the *Bee*, the quality of their candidate, opened the canvass by assessing him \$800 as his share of the state campaign fund.²⁸ This was a far cry from the days in which Morton had headed the state committee. At that time it was the committee's boast that no candidate paid a cent into the state fund. In 1892, on the other hand, the committee could boast that it had contributed nothing to the expenses of the gubernatorial candidate. As he had always done when in the service of the Democracy, Morton paid all of his own expenses.

All three of the candidates for governor made aggressive speaking campaigns. From the beginning Morton looked upon the fight as

²⁶ August 31, 1892. In connection with the narrative of the 1892 state campaign it is worthwhile to note the maneuvering of Edward Rosewater, hard-hitting, quick-thinking editor of the *Omaha Bee*. On account of the defeat of Richards in the 1890 campaign, enmities had arisen in the Republican ranks and there were two factions. Rosewater was determined to defeat Thomas J. Majors, his old-time political enemy, in the latter's aspiration for governor. Rosewater argued that the Republicans must nominate someone who had had no part in the inter-party squabble. He then brought out Judge Lorenzo Crounse, who had been away from state politics as an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in Washington. In nominating Crounse Rosewater dealt a severe blow to the Democratic and Populist candidates. Crounse was the father-in-law of Gilbert M. Hitchcock, publisher and owner of the *World-Herald*. Family considerations prevented Hitchcock from entering aggressively into the campaign. The *World-Herald* was colorless in the gubernatorial canvass, though it supported Bryan zealously in his race for Congress. The batteries of the most powerful organ against the Republican Party were spiked insofar as the main campaign was concerned. No one knows what the militant advocacy of the *World-Herald* in the support of either Van Wyck or Morton might have done to the final figures in the election. Support of Van Wyck would probably have elected him. At any rate, it is certain that the total would have been very definitely changed.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ J. B. Sheean to Morton, September 17, 1892.

between Van Wyck and himself.²⁹ Consequently, he devoted most of his time to a criticism of the Populist candidate, and the platform upon which he was running. In doing so, he probably was going against the wishes of the majority of the party, who would have preferred Van Wyck to any Republican. Friends wrote him earnest letters, urging him to turn his fire on Crounse rather than upon the Populist candidate.³⁰ When Morton refused to do so, many of his old friends felt that he was merely "playing the role of tail to Crounse's kite."³¹ There is no question, however, but what Morton would have preferred doing just that to seeing Van Wyck elected. Crounse was a Republican, to be sure; but Morton had always liked and respected him, and would have trusted him in the governor's office. He refused to turn his fire from Van Wyck.

The Democratic platform said nothing about silver. Therefore, unless a candidate were to be restricted to a narrow enunciation of the platform, he was free to express his own views on the question. Morton took that liberty, and as the campaign progressed, concentrated an increasing amount of his attention upon the coinage problem. After all, the Populists and Van Wyck were rabid on free silver; and Morton was out to kill them both. The importance of the silver issue in Morton's mind is evident in a campaign letter sent to the voters of the state, just before the election. After a short introduction, reviewing his thirty-eight years in Nebraska, and criticising Republican administration of the state's affairs, and their enactment of protective tariffs, he devoted his plea for election to one topic—silver:

. . . The industrial welfare of Nebraska depends upon wholesome National Laws which shall not compel farmers to pay artificial prices for the things they buy in a market whence foreign competition is excluded, and force farmers to sell with all the world as their competitors, in the very countries where they are not permitted to buy.

The material prosperity of Nebraska is dependent also very largely upon an honest circulating medium.

The measure of value must contain, or faithfully represent, VALUE.

Government has no right to, by law, put an artificial price on any of the products of labor.

No law can create value.

²⁹ Morton to Emma Morton, September 17, 1892.

³⁰ Cf. Sherman to Morton, September 26, 1892.

³¹ Morton-Watkins, III:244.

I oppose the free coinage of silver, because like a Protective Tariff, it puts an artificial price upon silver. It compels the United States to coin it at \$1.29 an ounce, when its bullion value is only 80 odd cents an ounce.

Silver is a product of the earth dragged out by human toil.

Corn is also an earth product educed by labor.

The cost of Silver and of corn is the labor they contain.

The value of silver is determined by the relation of the supply of silver to the demand for silver.

The value of corn is determined by the same inexorable economic law.

The relation of supply to demand is the sole regulator of value.

Probably not one economist of reputation in the country but would have supported such a proposition as the above; and not a political scientist but would have hailed Morton's campaign letter as an encouraging sign that American politicians at last were turning from personalities to issues. There is doubt, however, that its cold reasoning appealed with any great vigor to men who went into the campaign singing such songs as:

The dollar of our daddies,
Of silver coinage free,
Will make us rich and happy,
Will bring prosperity.³²

Meanwhile, Congressman Bryan, running for re-election on the same ticket with Morton, made a different interpretation of the platform's silence on the silver question. He told his audiences that he was in favor of the free coinage of silver. He presented no learned arguments at all. When the agricultural adherents of 'Silver Dick' quizzed him on the currency, he replied with disarming candor: "I don't know anything about free silver. The people of Nebraska are for free silver and I am for free silver. I will look up the arguments later."³³

The farmers were won over completely. Perhaps there was merit in Morton's later characterization of his running mate: "Bryan is so self-adjusting that—in his fine flexibility—he can agree with a greater number of persons who hold different views on the same question than any pin-feathered economist I have ever met."³⁴

Rumors started to flow in that Bryan's friends were proving as flexible with regard to candidates as their champion was with regard

³² Quoted in Hicks, *op. cit.*, 204.

³³ *Omaha World-Herald*, September 28, 1892; quoted in Hibben, *op. cit.*, 145.

³⁴ Morton to Michael D. Harter, January 9, 1893.

to issues. It seemed that in Congressman Bryan's district, Democrats were promising to vote for Van Wyck for governor, if only the Populists would vote for the Democratic candidate for Congress. The center of disaffection was Lincoln, Bryan's home and the most populous town in the district. There Bryan's friends, claiming that Morton's speeches on silver were really directed against the Congressman, declared quite freely their intention to vote for Van Wyck.³⁵

Ostensibly, Bryan did not sanction the proposed dicker: he was reported to have urged the Democrats of Lincoln to support the straight ticket, and had declared that there was no fight between himself and the candidate for governor.³⁶

The rumors, nevertheless, persisted, and were not confined to Lincoln. They came from every part of the district. Many Democrats tried to discount them as "Republican lies," but they would not be downed. Morton himself was convinced that Democrats were working against him. Early in the campaign he wrote his sister: "My worst enemies are Democrats. They are thickest among Bryan's friends and seek to trade me off for Van Wyck to get in exchange votes for Bryan."³⁷

The results of the election confirmed Morton's opinion that Bryan's friends were trading him for Van Wyck. Morton ran a poor third, almost twenty-five thousand votes behind Van Wyck, who trailed the victorious Crounse by less than ten thousand.³⁸ It was the most overwhelming defeat of Morton's thirty-eight years of political life. The First Congressional District, which re-elected William Jennings Bryan by a plurality of just 140, snowed Morton under by 5,500 votes. Bryan evidently attracted many Populist votes, as Jerome Shamp, the People's candidate, received but 2,409.³⁹ We can be certain that Morton received no Populist votes; nor, evidently, all of the Democratic votes in the First District.

³⁵ H. J. Whitmore to Morton, October 9, 1892.

³⁶ F. L. Francis to Morton, October 31, 1892.

³⁷ Morton to Emma Morton, October 6, 1892.

³⁸ The vote was: Lorenzo Crounse, Republican, 78,426; C. H. Van Wyck, Populist, 68,617; J. Sterling Morton, Democrat, 44,195; C. E. Bentley, Prohibitionist, 6,235.—Morton-Watkins, III:244n.

³⁹ Hibben, *op. cit.*, 143.

The passing years had made Morton used to defeat, but they had never taught him to accept it with particularly good grace, nor imbued him with any inclination to moderate his views because of the result of an election.

My campaign was for principle [he wrote in answer to a letter of condolence]. It was against a Protective Tariff, and the free coinage of silver, because I am adverse to putting artificial prices either upon wool, tin or silver, by statute. And I regret neither the time, effort, or cash which the campaign cost. The candidature was put upon me. It was neither sought nor bought. The duties it placed upon me I have faithfully discharged, amidst environments and under conditions which were unpropitious, but I would go through it all again to kill off that hybrid known as a *Van Wyck* Democrat and to put to rest forever the tough old political capon, just underscored, whom I scored in nearly 60 counties. And for it all I ask nothing, and expect nothing more than the respect of Democrats who admire pluck and adhere to principle.⁴⁰

By his stubborn devotion to his honestly held beliefs, Morton had won the respect of Democrats who admired pluck and adhered to principle—and it happened that the man who had been elected President of the United States was just such a Democrat.

⁴⁰ Morton to A. B. Charde, November 14, 1892.

PART FIVE

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

AS SOON AS THE RESULTS of the election of 1892 were known, Democrats of the Northwest started a strong movement to put J. Sterling Morton in President Cleveland's cabinet as Secretary of Agriculture. The agricultural portfolio had been placed in the cabinet during Cleveland's first term and from the beginning it had seemed to Westerners of both parties a post that should be filled from among the men of the West.

The Morton movement was led by the *Chicago Herald*, which immediately after the election demanded the agricultural post for the Democracy of the West, and urged Morton as the most satisfactory representative of that group:

Mr. Morton is a practical farmer. He is the originator of Arbor Day, which is now observed as a holiday in many western states. He is, moreover, a doctrinaire democrat who has never hesitated or feared to give forcible expression to his views on economic questions, particularly the tariff. . . . Besides, Mr. Morton is personally worthy of any honor which the democratic party or its president-elect can bestow upon him. . . .¹

Other papers added their voices to the rapidly swelling chorus. The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* declared Morton would be "an excellent representative of the northwest in the administration."² The Springfield (Illinois) *State Register*, to mention another, called him "a good man for the place . . . able, level-headed and thoroughly demo-

¹ November 11, 1892.

² November 15, 1892.

cratic.”³ The Democratic press of Nebraska advocated the appointment of their standard-bearer with virtual unanimity.

Morton's close Democratic friends in Nebraska made a successful effort to heal the factional differences in the party long enough to present a united endorsement of Morton for the position.⁴ After the Jackson Club of the state had passed a resolution of endorsement, the Democratic State Committee, with but two dissenting votes, recommended Morton's appointment to the President.⁵

Nonpolitical support came in the form of endorsements from both the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture and the State Horticultural Society.⁶ Though motivated by other than political considerations, the American Forestry Association added to Morton's prestige in the agricultural world by electing him its president, in recognition of his long and meritorious service in the interest of tree planting and forest preservation.⁷

Partly as a means of pushing him for the cabinet, and partly in the hope that they might be able to elect him, Morton's friends entered him in the senatorial contest. It was felt that if the Democrats would unite on Morton, in the foreseen deadlock between the Republicans and the Populists, he might possibly be elected. The Democrats, however, refused to unite on any man, and as they had done to their detriment in the past, scattered their votes on the basis of individual preference.⁸ The Republicans had united on John M. Thurston, general solicitor for the Union Pacific. When it became evident that a man with such obvious railroad connections could not be elected, there was some talk that the Thurston strength would be shifted to Morton to prevent the election of a Populist. Having been telephoned by a friend that the chances of his election would be good if only he were present in Lincoln, Morton went to the capital city and had a long conference with Thurston and other members of the Republican Party. They promised to throw their strength to “a Democrat,”⁹ presumably Morton, but failed to do so.

³ January 18, 1893.

⁴ Cf. W. D. McHugh to Morton, November 21, December 31, 1892.

⁵ Sawyer to Morton, December 11, 1892.

⁶ Furnas to Morton, December 1, 1892.

⁷ B. E. Fernow, Chairman of the Executive Committee to the American Forestry Association, to Morton, December 8, 1892.

⁸ *Nebraska House Journal*, 1893; *Nebraska Senate Journal*, 1893.

⁹ Arbor Lodge Journal, February 6, 1893.

The Union Pacific, it appeared, would rather take a chance on a Populist from its own territory than a man who had been connected with the Burlington.¹⁰ The U. P. got its Populist in the election of William Vincent Allen.

Morton did not take seriously his chances for success as a candidate for the Senate, nor, indeed, hardly considered himself such a candidate. "This does not fret me," he wrote in his diary. "The people have benefitted by my citizenship if I have not. And a man should be prouder of what he has done for the State than of what the State has done for him."¹¹

He manifested the same attitude toward the campaign to put him in President Cleveland's cabinet. A typical reply to inquiring and well-wishing friends was: "Thanks. The position you assign me as Secretary of Agriculture would be a very agreeable position. But, while I should like it ever so much, and do really think that in that place I could accomplish much in the interests of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Forestry I can not ask for it, seek it, beg for it. Honors should come, instead of being dragged to oneself by oneself."¹²

He even refused to visit the East during the winter for fear that such action might be construed that he was seeking a post in the President's cabinet.¹³ Moreover, he steadfastly refused to let himself believe that he had a chance of receiving the appointment. Even after he had heard from Dr. Miller that President Cleveland was seriously considering him, he wrote in his diary, only: "But I am not elated thereat for—though I feel somewhat qualified for that cabinet place—I have never attained a political place since Nebraska became a State in 1867. I am too positive and uncompromising to succeed. It is, perhaps, just as well. Honestly I have tried faithfully to do for the public weal and to advance the best material, mental & moral interests of the masses."¹⁴

On February 15, however, while visiting his sons in Chicago—and after having written his sister, "The cabinet position has gone, I think, to join the Senatorial boom"¹⁵—Morton received the follow-

¹⁰ Morton-Watkins, III:248.

¹¹ Arbor Lodge Journal, January 12, 1893.

¹² Morton to Furnas, November 20, 1892.

¹³ Morton to Harter, November 14, 1892.

¹⁴ Arbor Lodge Journal, January 6, 1893.

¹⁵ Morton to Emma Morton, February 15, 1893.

ing telegram: "J. STERLING MORTON—CAN YOU MEET ME AT LAKEWOOD, NEW JERSEY AND HOW SOON.—GROVER CLEVELAND."

Two days later, at Lakewood, in the presence of his son Paul, Morton was tendered and accepted the secretaryship of the Department of Agriculture.¹⁶

It was an appointment which exhibited the President's rugged individuality as much probably as the choice of Walter Q. Gresham, a life-long Republican, as Secretary of State. No Democrat in the West had abused Cleveland as had J. Sterling Morton, yet when it became evident to the President that in Morton he had probably the outstanding Western exponent of sound money, tariff revision, and economy in government, as well as a man peculiarly fitted for the agricultural post, he was able to brush aside the abuse with the remark: "We cannot afford, in this crisis, when, if ever, such men are needed, to let personal considerations enter into account. Under no circumstances will I, in this case or any other, allow them to influence my opinion or action."¹⁷

George F. Parker, an intimate associate of Grover Cleveland, called the Morton appointment the most pertinent illustration that ever came to his attention of the President's ability to discard personal prejudice.¹⁸ Clearly, it proved that Morton had been wrong in his estimate of the President; for no such man as he had depicted in those vitriolic interviews of four years earlier would have been capable of such an act. Cleveland and Morton not only associated officially during the Administration, but became close friends. Morton did not hesitate to admit that he had been mistaken in his estimate of the man who for steadfast, unflinching adherence to principle as he saw it, has had few peers in American political life.

The friends of tariff reform all over the country rejoiced in Morton's appointment. "Marse Henry" Watterson, with whom Morton had talked all night a few weeks before when the editor lectured in Lincoln, wrote: "My Dear Governor: As the girl said when she had been safely delivered of her first baby, 'I'm tickled all over.'" ¹⁹ Others, if less expressive, were just as emphatic.

¹⁶ Arbor Lodge Journal, February 17, 1893.

¹⁷ George F. Parker, *Recollections of Grover Cleveland* (New York, 1909), 178.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Henry Watterson to Morton, February 19, 1893.

The press, particularly in the West, echoed with praise of the appointment. The *Chicago Times* said Morton would make "a striking addition to the official family of Mr. Cleveland"; the *Detroit Free Press*: "The announcement . . . will be very gratifying to hosts of Michigan Democrats"; the *Kansas City Star*: ". . . a man whose splendid ability has kept him for many years in a hopeless minority . . . will not fail to acquit himself with honor and distinction. . . . No better appointment has been made by any President"; the *Louisville Courier Journal*: "The appointment of the Hon. J. Sterling Morton caps the climax of good workmanship. If the President had raked the party with a fine-tooth comb he could not have found a Democrat so fitted in all points for this important post. . . . He will make a model head of the Department of Agriculture, but on all the great questions of the time he is true to the core, and Mr. Cleveland will find in him a counsellor and friend at once wise and loyal. . . ." ²⁰

Morton was accompanied on the journey from Chicago to Washington by his four sons and their wives. It was a proud day. After thirty years of political life in which his refusal to moderate in the slightest views which he held to be right had prevented him from achieving any public place, it was with a feeling that all had not been in vain that he went to Washington to take a place in the President's cabinet—the first man from west of the Missouri River ever to be so honored. The only sadness in the occasion came from the wish that Caroline, who had borne so many of the defeats, so much of the vilification, could have been there, too.

The new Secretary of Agriculture slipped easily into the life of official Washington, and by the urbanity of his bearing did much to give the junior portfolio in the President's cabinet an equal dignity with the rest. Since its creation, the Department of Agriculture had been the butt of much joking, particularly in the Eastern papers. Morton's predecessor, General Jeremiah M. Rusk of Wisconsin, had been fondly called "Uncle Jerry," and much of the interest that had surrounded him was due to the suggestion of hayseed which attached to his name.²¹

²⁰ Morton Scrapbooks.

²¹ *New York World*, February 27, 1893.

The reporters soon came to see, however, that there was nothing of the hayseed about Morton. On the contrary, the opinion was often expressed that the Secretary of Agriculture was the best-dressed and most urbane man in the cabinet.²²

Morton's unfailing humor, however, was always ready to make the most of the bucolic nature of his office. The following, to Henry Thurber, the President's private secretary, is illustrative:

Be kind enough to inform me, by the return of the messenger who carries this to you, whether the gentlemen of the Cabinet who are to appear at the White House at 5:30 this afternoon, are expected to come in full dress, or Prince Albert suits. We grangers are a little unused to so much daylight style, and therefore, have to inquire of the disciples of urbanity, like yourself, who are *comme il faut* in all these social requirements.

It is my intention now to yoke up the steers so as to arrive there in time, if I finish husking the corn, feeding the pigs, and milking the cows in time to get up there.²³

Though affable and congenial, Morton took a relatively small part in the social life of the capital. The two apartments occupied by himself and his sister, Miss Emma Morton, who looked after the social aspects of his position, were modest, although comfortable. The Secretary entertained formally no more than was absolutely necessary. To formal functions, he much preferred a drive out to Overlook Inn, or some other country place, for a quiet dinner with a newspaper man or other person with whom he could forget the cares of office in good conversation.²⁴

Morton found his associates in the cabinet attractive and interesting. They had been chosen by the President not upon conventional political considerations, but upon lines of individual choice.²⁵ They were for the most part men of individual merit, rather than merely the representatives of various sections of the country or shades of opinion in the Democratic Party.

Of all of his colleagues, Morton became the most intimate with Richard Olney, the Boston lawyer whom Cleveland appointed Attorney General, and, upon the death of Gresham, Secretary of State. Morton spent part of one of his vacations at Falmouth, the Olney's

²² Morton Scrapbooks.

²³ Morton to Henry Thurber, January 20, 1894.

²⁴ John Nordhouse, Morton's private secretary, to the author, in conversation.

²⁵ Woodrow Wilson, "Mr. Cleveland's Cabinet," *Review of Reviews*, VII (April 1893), 286.



THE COUNTRY SQUIRE IN HIS RIG ARRIVING AT HOME WITH
HIS SECRETARY, JOHN NORDHOUSE



THE CABINET MEMBER AT HIS DESK IN WASHINGTON



GROVER CLEVELAND'S SECOND CABINET

(READING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

BACK ROW: DAVID R. FRANCIS, WILLIAM L. WILSON, HILARY A. HERBERT, J. STERLING MORTON
FRONT ROW: DANIEL S. LAMONT, RICHARD OLNEY, GROVER CLEVELAND, JOHN G. CARLISLE, JUDSON HARMON

summer home. He dined frequently at the Olney's in Washington. Indeed, Sunday evenings at the Olney's with Morton and Senator Vilas of Wisconsin as guests became something of a tradition, as did the boiled onions, "served with New England regularity," for the benefit of the Westerners.

With the President, also, Morton's relations were most happy. Each of the two men found much to admire in the other's conservatism and undying devotion to principle. Early in his administration, President Cleveland confided to Don Dickinson that he considered Morton one of the great "finds" of his cabinet.²⁶ Under the guidance of the President, the Secretary of Agriculture became an enthusiastic if not too adept fisherman.

The second Cleveland Administration was, like the first, hard-working. Led by the President, who often was at his desk until two or three o'clock in the morning,²⁷ the members of the cabinet took their work seriously and gave it all of their strength—one of them, Secretary Gresham, his life. Morton was no exception. Hours meant nothing to him, and often he was in his office until late at night. Always he was back in the morning before eight. Frequently, with John Nordhouse, his private secretary, he spent his Sundays in the office, going through mountains of correspondence and attending to other details, undisturbed by the place-seeking throng that beset his every weekday.

It was almost a year before an assistant secretary was appointed. Edwin Willitts, General Rusk's assistant, and who, incidentally, had been reared in Morton's home town of Monroe, Michigan, remained in office, but he was in Chicago most of the time supervising the department's activities at the Columbian Exposition. When finally President Cleveland did choose an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, he selected a most excellent one—Dr. Charles Dabney, President of the University of Tennessee. Morton had never seen Dr. Dabney before the latter was sworn into office, but he soon came to rely with implicit faith upon his scientific training and systematic methods. In addition, the two men became close personal friends. They worked in harmony to give the Department of Agriculture one of its most efficient and economical administrations.

²⁶ Cf. Morton to Emma Morton, May 26, 1893.

²⁷ Nevins, *op. cit.*, 521.

None of the traditionally great problems of the tumultuous second Cleveland Administration came directly within the scope of the Department of Agriculture. The Venezuelan and Hawaiian crises, the financial disturbance, and the labor difficulties were dealt with by the President through the departments of State, Treasury, and Justice. Nevertheless, the administration of the Department of Agriculture, possibly more than any other, was typically Clevelandesque in the rigid economy and strict conservatism with which its affairs were conducted.

Morton had not been long in office before he discovered that the Department of Agriculture was conducted on principles completely at variance with his ideas concerning the proper administration of a department of the government. General Rusk was a jovial, kind-hearted soul who took a paternal interest in the welfare of the farmers, and he had not been inclined to scrutinize too closely demands made upon the government in behalf of the agricultural population. He had greatly multiplied the functions of the department, and at times had created jobs for no other purpose than to provide employment for a needy farmer friend, or the son or daughter of such a friend. In short, the Department of Agriculture was well on the way to becoming a national feed bag with "Uncle Jerry" contentedly doling out the grain. It was clear that Morton, who for thirty years had inveighed against all forms of paternalism, and had urged the strictest economy in the administration of public affairs, would have an heroic opportunity to make good his many speeches and newspaper articles.

The new Secretary probed every division of the department in search of opportunities to economize. He wrote the heads of all the bureaus asking them to furnish him with a list of employees and functions which could be dispensed with without injury to the public service. He did not rely upon bureau heads alone for information concerning ways in which the department's expenditures could be cut; but personally investigated accounts, quick to observe instances of seeming extravagance.

. . . I notice that the feed-bill for your horses during the past ten months has averaged \$178.77 per month [he wrote to the director of an experiment station]. That I consider extravagant beyond all reason. . . . If the farmers of this country had to pay \$178.77 per month for the subsistence of each span of horses they use, I think the annual crop would find them badly in debt.

But you may say that this embraces the cattle also. Very well. Admitting that, it must have been a large herd of cattle to consume \$178.77 worth of forage. But in order that you may have a fair chance to show why this tremendous outgo of money is permitted, I will be pleased to have you state the number of cattle you have averaged each day for the last ten months, and the amount of food they have consumed.

I wish it distinctly understood that wherever there is an opportunity to economize, it should be embraced with alacrity, and that if you do not economize some one will be put in your place who will.²⁸

Every position that seemed to the Secretary unnecessary was abolished, regardless of the personal interests affected. Some men, such as the man who had hired out to "Uncle Jerry" as a "rain-maker," and who proposed to remove the problem of drouths by atmospheric concussion, could be easily dismissed. This employee's letter of dismissal contained the Secretary's opinion that the method was altogether "too noisy, uncertain, expensive, and dangerous."²⁹ Other jobs, particularly minor clerical positions that had been created at the instigation of a senator or representative for an impecunious friend, were more difficult to abolish. If Morton thought them unnecessary, however, he abolished them, paying no attention to the complaints against his course.

A practice that Morton abandoned completely was that of sending employees of the department, at government expense, to speak before whatever agricultural organizations desired their presence. This, Morton held, not only demoralized the work of the department by keeping its best men on the road much of the time, but was an unwarranted expenditure of public money. He was not averse to allowing his employees to appear before agricultural groups as official representatives of the department, but he insisted that the organizations so favored must pay the expenses connected therewith. This action brought much complaint, particularly from organizations that had replaced their Republican officers with Democrats so as to be in a position to continue to enjoy the favors of the government. Morton's handling of the particularly insistent secretary of the Michigan Dairymen's Association is a good example of his attitude:

²⁸ Morton Letterbooks.

²⁹ Secretary of Agriculture, Official Correspondence.

. . . You state: "The writer is a staunch Democrat, and it comes with mighty hard grace to go before a convention and say that I am unable to obtain a representative of that Department to assist us."

Now you refer to the Department of Agriculture, and ask me (by implication, at least) to use it for a political purpose, when it was not established for any such business. . . .

While the Secretary is a Democrat, his conception of duty does not lead him to use the Department of Agriculture for purely political purposes, as you seem to suggest. . . . Did not Democrats generally complain, during the late administration of Mr. Harrison, that every department was prostituted to party purposes? Did we not declare that if we were entrusted with the affairs of the American people, we would retrench and reform the expenditures of the tax-gathered money of the United States? And it seems to me that it is my duty, under oath, to carry out the promises we made as to an honest and efficient administration. . . .³⁰

Morton also set out to abolish all experiment stations which he felt redounded more to private than the public good. In this instance the axe fell heaviest on his own state where the department had expended considerable effort in the promotion of the beet sugar industry. The fact that Nebraska was affected did not in the least deter the Secretary. It was his opinion that "if the two sugar factories in the state have not enough good sense to enable them to thoroughly investigate the best method of cultivating beets for the manufacture of sugar, and enough enterprise to enlighten the people whom they wish to engage in that cultivation, I do not think that the Government of the United States can impress upon them by the expenditure of more money the value of extending their business interests."³¹ Moreover, consistent with his position as a free trader, he felt that "those who raise corn should not be taxed to encourage those who desire to raise beets. The power to tax was never vested in a Government for the purpose of building up one class at the expense of other classes."³²

Every bill to appropriate money for special purposes was looked upon suspiciously by the Secretary. If it could not run the gamut of rigid *laissez faire*, if there was the slightest danger that it would extend the functions of the government, if it was paternal in any aspect, the Secretary of Agriculture was against it. When, for example, J. Z. George, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agricul-

³⁰ Morton to S. J. Wilson, January 29, 1894.

³¹ Morton to Dr. H. W. Wiley, Agricultural Department Chemist, June 13, 1893.

³² Morton to Samuel Morris, Fleming, Colorado, December 11, 1893.

ture and Forestry, asked his opinion on a bill to appropriate money for the extermination of the Russian thistle in the states of the Northwest, Morton asked in return whether it was "the business of the Government of the United States to make appropriations out of which men, women, and boys are to be hired, at wages fixed by law, to exterminate weeds, called Russian thistles, any more than it is the business of that Government to prescribe the manner of plowing, planting, and cultivating cereals, cotton, and tobacco, and to limit the wages to be paid cultivators?" He was "forced to declare that the bill would be inutile, except as a bad precedent for more paternal law-making."³³

Morton's unyielding opposition to all forms of paternal legislation frequently disaffected members of the national legislature. An instance of particularly fervid disagreement arose out of the Secretary's attempt to abolish the cherished, and long-standing practice of distributing seeds at government expense.

The practice had originated in 1836 when Henry L. Ellsworth, the first United States Commissioner of Patents, conceived the idea of distributing rare and uncommon varieties of seeds among the farmers of the country. For three years he procured and distributed such seeds at his own expense. In 1839 Congress, upon his recommendation, appropriated \$1,000 to be taken from the Patent Office funds for seeds, the prosecution of agricultural investigations, and the procurement of agricultural statistics. From such small beginnings the distribution of free seeds had grown to be an enterprise which in 1892 required an appropriation of \$135,400.³⁴

Two-thirds of the seeds thus purchased were distributed on the basis of congressional allotments, and one-third by the Secretary of Agriculture. The seeds were commonly looked upon as a part of the election funds of congressmen from the rural areas, and it was reported that often representatives of urban constituencies sold their allotments to their rural colleagues. Moreover, the practice had long since degenerated into nothing more than a free distribution of common garden seeds with little attempt being made to introduce "rare and uncommon varieties."

³³ Morton to J. Z. George, January 4, 1894.

³⁴ Secretary of Agriculture, *Annual Report, 1893* (Washington, 1893), 17-18.

In his first annual report, Morton urged that the practice be abolished, declaring, "if there ever was a good reason for the original purchase of new and improved varieties of seeds for gratuitous distribution there is certainly now no valid reason for the purchase and distribution of ordinary seeds, bulbs, and cuttings which are common in all the States and Territories, and easily obtainable at low prices by the people generally."³⁵

In his second report he became more insistent. He attempted to show the absurdity of the distribution by declaring that while ostensibly the seeds were distributed for experimental purposes, the donee to report his results to the Department of Agriculture, in the distribution of 1893 only nine hundred and forty persons out of the 1,800,000 who received the seeds even acknowledged their receipt. The Secretary remarked:

In view of the above, it is difficult to see how any practical statesman can advocate an annual disbursement of \$160,000 for such a purpose. Educationally, that sum of money might be made of infinite advantage to the farmers of the United States if it were expended in the publication and distribution of bulletins showing, in terse and plain language, how chemistry, botany, entomology, forestry, vegetable pathology, veterinary, and other sciences may be applied to agriculture.

If, in a sort of paternal way, it is the duty of this Government to distribute anything gratuitously, are not new ideas of more permanent value than old seeds? Is it a function of government to make gratuitous distribution of any material thing?³⁶

In 1895, the question developed into a minor crisis when Morton failed to expend the amount appropriated for the distribution of seeds. Having been unsuccessful in dissuading Congress from making the appropriation, he took advantage of the verbiage of the act to gain his ends. The language of the appropriation had always stipulated that the money was to be used to purchase seeds "rare and uncommon to the country, or such as can be made more profitable by frequent changes from one part of our own country to another." Under a ruling from the Attorney General that he could not legally purchase any other kind of seeds, Morton rejected all of the bids offered in 1895 on the grounds that they did not meet the requirements of the act. Consequently, there were no seeds to dis-

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1894 (Washington, 1894), 69.

tribute, and the money appropriated remained undrawn from the Treasury.³⁷

Soon after the Fifty-fourth Congress assembled, it became evident that there was no intention on the part of the legislators to acquiesce in the Secretary's action. Senator Hansbrough of North Dakota, who had particularly resented Morton's attitude toward the bill to eradicate the Russian thistle, introduced a joint resolution:

That the Secretary of Agriculture be, and hereby is directed to carry into effect the provisions of the act making appropriations for the Department of Agriculture for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1896, for the purchase and distribution of valuable seeds . . . and as the public exigency requires that the valuable seeds, bulbs, trees, shrubs, vines, cuttings, and plants, to be purchased under the authority of the said act and by the said appropriation, may be ready for distribution at the earliest possible date, the Secretary of Agriculture is hereby directed to procure them by open purchase or contract at the places and in the manner in which such articles are usually bought and sold. . . .³⁸

The resolution was passed and carried into effect without the approval of President Cleveland.

In addition to forcing the Secretary of Agriculture to continue the distribution of garden seeds, the resolution furnished a convenient pretext for congressmen to air their grievances against him. The issue at stake was whether or not an executive officer of the government could set aside the laws of Congress; and there was little question on either side but that the position of Congress was the constitutional one. Even with this understood, however, the Senate found it impossible to pass the resolution directing the Secretary to do his duty before they had taken advantage of the opportunity to discuss him personally.

Senator Hansbrough said he was little more than a "high grade clerk," and doubted very much whether he "comprehends the importance of his duty in the position which he occupies."³⁹

The most vigorous of Morton's critics was Senator Vest of Missouri, who filled several pages of the *Congressional Record* with his none-too-favorable opinions of the Secretary of Agriculture.

"The Democratic Party," he said, "has been most unfortunate, not only in the dissensions which exist in its own ranks, but in the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1895 (Washington, 1895), 54-55.

³⁸ *Congressional Record*, Fifty-fourth Congress, First Session, 487.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 975.

fact that the devil, to use a Western phrase, has owed the party a grudge, and has paid us in a Secretary of Agriculture. If that officer had taken a contract to make the party to which he ostensibly belongs odious with the farmers of the United States, he could not have carried it out more successfully. . . ." ⁴⁰

The Secretary made no further effort to contest the wishes of Congress, but in his last annual report he made it clear that his opinion on the matter had not changed, and called the money he had expended at the behest of Congress a "gratuity, paid for by money raised from all the people, and bestowed upon a few people." ⁴¹

Despite the criticism directed at his policies, the record shows that Morton achieved what he had set out to do as Secretary of Agriculture—to give the department an economical and efficient administration.

During the four years in which he held office, the Department of Agriculture returned to the Treasury \$2,066,661.19 out of a total appropriation of \$11,179,445.45, ⁴² a saving of more than eighteen per cent. This significant saving was effected by the reduction of the number of employees from 2,497 to 2,217, the abolition of as many unnecessary services as possible, and a businesslike management of the entire department.

Much of Morton's effort for increased efficiency was directed toward the extension of civil service. He had come to his office unenthusiastic about civil service, but soon had come to see that the work of the Department of Agriculture was of such a nature as to make it most difficult to carry on under the old spoils system which brought about a complete change in personnel every four years. Having observed this, Morton used every legitimate means to extend the classified service. By the close of his administration every important position in the department had been brought under civil service except those of secretary, assistant secretary, chief of the Weather Bureau, and the secretary's private clerk. On March 4,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1323.

⁴¹ Secretary of Agriculture, *Annual Report, 1896*. (Washington, 1896), 39.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

1893, there were 698 positions in the Department of Agriculture under the civil service; on November 1, 1896, 1,658.⁴³

Morton's efforts for economy and efficiency were not merely in the line of retrenchment, but were directed primarily toward an improvement of the service; for though he had declared that "if the department of agriculture is to be conducted in the spirit of paternalism the sooner it is abolished the better for the United States,"⁴⁴ he was clearly aware of functions that were legitimate to it.

Chief among these were scientific investigations. Morton added three new lines of investigation to the work of the department: agrostology, agricultural soils and crop production, and road improvement. He made efforts to improve all types of scientific investigation conducted by the department by insisting upon a careful administration of each division, and by attracting men of as much experience and training as was possible under the salaries which he was allowed to pay. In his last annual report, he regretted that the funds made available by Congress for experimental purposes and for the payment of salaries sufficiently large to attract men of high calibre were not greater.

The Weather Bureau, one of the most popular of the department's divisions, greatly improved and increased its services during Morton's administration. More than 10,000 cities, towns, and villages were added to the list of beneficiaries receiving the Weather Bureau service. The practice of posting daily weather maps in the principal cities was inaugurated upon a permanent basis. A Weather Bureau service was established especially for the benefit of cereal growers.⁴⁵

A work inaugurated under Morton's direction, and in which he felt particular pride, was the Section of Foreign Markets. This was to supplement the scientific work of the experiment stations and the agricultural colleges: "Science is constantly showing the farmer how to increase the annual product per acre in cereals and other staples, but the great question confronting each tiller of the soil is, how to secure satisfactory remuneration for the results of his toil."⁴⁶

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁴⁴ *Chicago Sunday Chronicle*, September 15, 1895.

⁴⁵ Secretary of Agriculture, *Annual Report, 1896* (Washington, 1896), 34.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

The purpose of the Section of Foreign Markets was twofold: to study ways in which to extend foreign markets for agricultural products, and to supply information to farmers on the state of those markets. Moreover, a discussion of foreign markets gave the Secretary an excellent opportunity to speak didactically upon the evils of the protective tariff.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

CLEVELAND'S STORMY PETREL

MORTON'S ENERGY WAS by no means completely concentrated upon the administration of the Department of Agriculture. To be sure, he was thoroughgoing in his conduct of the department's affairs; but, as behooved an adviser of the President, he gave thought to all problems of government. Moreover, it had never been Morton's practice to withhold an expression of opinion; and becoming a cabinet officer did not in the least alter that characteristic. The Secretary of Agriculture gave his opinions freely, and on all subjects, as he had done as a private citizen.

The reporters who covered the nation's capital soon recognized that here was a government official who always spoke "for the record," and who was never too busy to answer at some length and in vigorous language any question they might put to him. This fact, combined with his natural affability, soon made Morton a favorite with the newsmen.¹ Their calls became increasingly frequent, with the result that Morton seldom was out of the papers.

He was called the "stormy petrel" of the second Cleveland Administration: "Morton believed in contention for contention's stormy sake. Peace was the only failure, war ever a success in Morton's eyes. And, because of his innate mood for strife, Morton had backed into every conviction he possessed. Bent for conflict, he must be the opposite of an environment. Being among free-soil folk, he

¹ John Nordhouse to the author.

had been for slavery in the old days, coming from a silver region . . . he was a fierce champion of gold; finding protectionists all about him, he was for beating tariff to the flat levels of free trade; hemmed in at home by a solid wall of Republicans, he was a Democrat whom Jefferson would have applauded and Jackson taken by the hand. . . ."²

Occasionally the President had to restrain the most outspoken of all his advisers. One such time came in connection with an incident one might have supposed had been long forgotten—Morton's expulsion from the University of Michigan, back in 1854. The officials of the University, observing the success of their erring student of another day, invited him to return to his Alma Mater to receive an honorary degree. The Secretary of Agriculture not only declined, but did it in language much more suited to the frontier than official Washington. Before mailing the letter, he read it to his sister, Emma. She immediately objected. Her brother was obstinate. Finally she prevailed upon him to consult the President. When Cleveland saw the letter, he laughed till his sides shook and tears streamed from his eyes.

"Morton," he said, "I haven't had more fun over a letter in years." Then after a short pause he added: "It's too bad you can't send it."

All during the summer of 1893, while the President and his advisers were busy with plans to secure the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Law, Morton's views on the iniquities of the law, and the political incapacity of the men responsible for it, were telegraphed to the country many times. If for a short period there might have been some doubt where the Secretary of the Treasury stood,³ there was certainly none as to the position of the Secretary of Agriculture. He advocated immediate and unconditional repeal, and from his correspondence it is clear that he was impatient with what seemed to many the faltering steps of Secretary of the Treasury Carlisle during the critical summer months of 1893.

It was Morton's opinion that the Sherman law could, by its language, be construed to give the Secretary of the Treasury discretionary powers over the purchase of silver bullion. He declared

² Alfred Henry Lewis, "The Lighter Side, Little Comedies of Mr. Cleveland's Second Cabinet." Reprinted by special permission of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Copyright 1903 by The Curtis Publishing Company.

³ Cf. Davis Rich Dewey, *Financial History of the United States* (New York, 1903), 444-445.

to his colleagues and the President that it was calamitous to wait upon the repeal of the law, and that it would be proper for the Secretary of the Treasury to refuse to purchase the stipulated 4,500,000 ounces of silver each month, "and allow the courts an impeachment trial to determine whose construction of the law was correct." ⁴

Unable to persuade the President and Secretary Carlisle to adopt his extreme and dogmatic views, Morton bent strenuous efforts toward aiding the repeal of the ill-favored law. He wrote conservatives all over the country, that unless they stirred up sentiment for repeal, and brought pressure to bear upon Congress, there would be little hope for rapid action. "Nothing but outside pressure," he declared, "will accelerate the movements of the . . . debating society in the capitol." ⁵

Conservatives, he feared, were unaware of the danger that faced the country. The situation reminded him of sermons he used to hear: "The Devil never takes any vacation; . . . he works tirelessly every day, every night, every hour, every minute, every second. And that remark is brought to mind by the fact that the free coinage devils are ceaselessly laboring to infect the public mind with their heresies. Their efforts are as continuous as the currents of the Missouri River, and, in argument, just as turgid, as tortuous, and as muddy." ⁶

Morton's opinion that the Sherman Act should be immediately repealed was discussed fully in the press. Friendly papers found it "refreshing to find a public man talking about the money question in the straight-forward manner Secretary Morton employ[s] . . ." ⁷ Those not so friendly condemned him for "nursing a presidential boom for himself instead of looking after the affairs of the farmers for whom the agricultural portfolio was created." ⁸

If, during the summer, Morton had alienated various persons because of his outspoken opinions on the silver question, a speech delivered at the opening of the Congress on Agriculture held in Chi-

⁴ Morton to Perkins, July 7, 1893; *See also* Morton to Atkinson, June 14, 1893.

⁵ Morton to Horace White, August 17, 1893.

⁶ Morton to G. M. Lambertson, July 7, 1893.

⁷ *New York Post*, July 22, 1893.

⁸ *Des Moines Register*, June 28, 1893.

ago, October 16, in connection with the World's Fair, was to make earlier antagonisms sink into insignificance. It was Morton's first speech as Secretary of Agriculture; farm leaders everywhere awaited it with considerable curiosity. The occasion furnished a golden opportunity to placate farmers in the West who might have been offended by the Secretary's remarks on the Sherman Act, and to win to his side many others. Morton, his tactless honesty in ascendance, saw it only as an opportunity to use his position to give weight to his firm opinions on the farm problem.

After opening his speech with a short discussion of the value of land ownership, and a contrast of rural and urban life, the Secretary of Agriculture said:

But the American farmer has foes to contend with. They are not merely the natural foes—not the weevil in the wheat, nor the murrain in cattle, nor the cholera in swine, nor the drouth, nor the chinch-bug. The most insidious and destructive foe to the farmer is the “professional” farmer who, as a “promoter” of granges and alliances, for political purposes, *Farms the Farmer*. . . .

My hope for the future of the farmer is not based upon gregariousness. He will not succeed better by forming granges and alliances—which too often seek to attend to some other business than farming, and frequently propose to run railroads and banks, and even to establish new systems of coinage for the Government—than he will by individual investigation of economic questions. Humanity generally, and the farmer particularly, has no enemy equal, in efficiency for evil, to *Ignorance*. . . .⁹

It was clear that accession to the President's cabinet had not changed the opinions of the man who a few years earlier, as a propagandist for the Burlington, had referred to the officers of the National Grange, as “the Plowboys of Pennsylvania Avenue.”¹⁰ After having thus stated the farm problem, the Secretary of Agriculture recommended for its solution: the diligent study by each farmer and his family of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, “to political economy as the New Testament is to the Christian religion”; careful reading of a daily newspaper “from a great city”; free trade; and finally, no restriction upon the accumulation of wealth.¹¹

The farmers of the West and South who in desperation because of deep agricultural depression had accepted the teachings of the

⁹ J. Sterling Morton, *Addresses . . . at Chicago, Ill., Oct. 13, 16, 1893* (Baltimore, 1893), 4–5.

¹⁰ See p. 209.

Grange, the alliance, and the "soft money" advocates, were in no mood to accept a speech devoted on the one hand to praise of *laissez faire* and accumulated wealth, and on the other, condemnation of all farm organizations. Speeches such as this made Morton epitomize in the minds of the Western farmer all that was wrong with the Cleveland Administration.

Farm leaders, those who "farmed the farmers," were not slow to defend themselves against the Secretary's attack. The next day, J. B. Brigham, Master of the National Grange, declared to the Agricultural Congress: "The only excuse for such words coming from the Secretary of Agriculture is the excuse of profound ignorance, beside which the darkness of night is nothing."¹²

At the national convention of the Grange, held in Syracuse, New York, in November, Grand Master Brigham flayed Morton at length, calling him "the railroad attorney and lobbyist who is now Secretary of Agriculture," and urged the passage of a resolution demanding his immediate removal from office. The Grange followed the Grand Master's wishes, and urged the President to remove Morton immediately, and to secure a Secretary of Agriculture "in accord with the farming interest" of the country.¹³

Added to the resolution of the National Grange were similar ones from local and state granges, and long, denunciatory editorials from agricultural magazines and newspapers. Criticism from such sources only served to convince Morton more fully of the righteousness of his position. He told a reporter for the *Washington Star* that he would "neither modify nor retract" anything he said at Chicago no matter what the results might be to him personally, politically or otherwise. "As a retractor I have always been a complete failure."¹⁴

To show his contempt for the criticism heaped upon him, Morton had his speech bound; and on the inside of the front cover and both sides of the back, he reprinted as many of the denunciatory resolutions as possible. On the front, seemingly to counterbalance all of the other criticism, he placed a comment from Professor Perry of Williams College, calling his address: "clear as a bell, sound as a nut and as lively as a play." Morton circulated one edition at his own

¹² *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, October 18, 1893.

¹³ *New York Tribune*, November 23, 1893.

¹⁴ November 24, 1893.

expense. After seeing it, Charles E. Perkins sent \$1,000 to print and circulate another edition. He felt that it was "a clear case . . . for the general good" to have Morton's speech as widely read as possible.¹⁵

Morton did not confine his controversy with the farm leaders to pamphlets and speeches, but answered each calumnious epistle at length and in kind. He wrote H. L. Loucks, of Huron, South Dakota, President of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, asking for permission, if another edition of the Chicago speech were issued, to include some of his criticism: "Nothing will give me greater satisfaction than to illustrate the fact that I have not incurred your friendship nor the peril of your endorsement."¹⁶

Occasionally, the persons to whom Morton's letters were addressed had parts of them published in their local papers. Walter Hines Page, then editor of *The Forum*, happened to see a report of a letter Morton had written to an Iowa farmer about "ploughing with preambles, planting with resolutions and gathering by legislative enactment." He had been trying for some time to get an article from the Secretary, and declared that Morton should not "waste his ammunition on one man," but give his ideas to the entire country. The subject of the farmer and politics, Page declared, Morton had made his own, "in a way that only one man in a generation makes a subject his own."¹⁷ The Secretary was finally persuaded, and the June number of *The Forum* carried as its leading article, "Farmers, Fallacies, and Furrows," by J. Sterling Morton.¹⁸ The *North American Review* for the same month also carried an article by the Secretary of Agriculture. It was entitled "Protection and the Proletariat."¹⁹

Both articles were an amplification of his World's Fair address. The thought he had hoped to inculcate among the farmers in that speech was the importance of individual development.²⁰ His magazine articles were devoted to the same purpose. He told the readers

¹⁵ Perkins to Morton, November 14, December 9, 1893.

¹⁶ Morton to H. L. Loucks, January 17, 1894.

¹⁷ Walter Hines Page to Morton, April 20, 1894.

¹⁸ J. Sterling Morton, "Farmers, Fallacies, and Furrows," *The Forum*, (June, 1894), 385-393.

¹⁹ J. Sterling Morton, "Protection and the Proletariat," *North American Review*, (June 1894), CLVII:641-646.

²⁰ Morton to George F. Nesbitt, Jr., March 9, 1894.

of *The Forum*: "The American farmers are better off to-day than the workers in any other vocation." Outside of the protective tariff, which was of course a real burden to the farmer, his only enemies were his "great many pretended friends . . . telling him how badly he is abused by Railroads and Banks; in short, by all corporate capital. Until these active pretenders zealously depicted the woes of farm life, few dwellers in the country realized, or even dreamed, that they were being cruelly oppressed, otherwise than by Protection."²¹

The readers of the *North American Review* had expounded to them Morton's oft-expressed belief that the labor troubles which beset the country were nothing but a legitimate outgrowth of the policy of protection:

Gradually the idea has pervaded the public mind that wealth may be created by the mere "be it enacted" of the lawmaking power, until now it is plain that the first strike in the United States was that of capital for higher profits. Capital demanded and received from Congress the enactment of laws which secured to it, by shutting out foreign competition, higher profits than freedom. And the law-making power conceded all that capital asked. . . . And, logically, labor petitioned the same lawmaking power to "enact" higher wages, prosperity, and leisure for laborers. . . .²²

Morton, a firm believer in *laissez faire*, opposed any attempt to force the government to interfere with the operation of "natural" economic law. He believed, and so declared in his writing and speaking, that those who desired government interference were indolent and intemperate, viciously selfish, or led astray by economic vagarists.

Though Morton returned from time to time to a discussion of general principles, it was the silver issue that occupied most of his political thinking during the four years he was Secretary of Agriculture. Silver furnished the burden of most of the many interviews he granted the press. It permeated his official reports. It even had its place in his conduct of the Department of Agriculture.

Morton concluded his official report for 1894 with a section entitled "Farm Products and the Money They Bring." Clearly it was

²¹ Morton, "Farmers, Fallacies, and Furrows," *loc. cit.*

²² Morton, "Protection and the Proletariat," *loc. cit.*

important to the farmers of the country that those who would establish the free coinage of silver should not have their way:

European markets and all the other markets of the world are demanding from the American farmer the very best quality of breadstuffs and meats. They demand them inspected, and governmentally certificated to be of the highest sanitary, nutritive, and edible quality. But farm products have only a specific purchasing power. They will only buy money of people who desire farm products. The farmer exchanges these results of his labors, which have a specific purchasing power, for money, which has a general purchasing power. It is important, therefore, to farmers everywhere that they demand money for their products which has the highest general purchasing power throughout all the civilized world. It is as vital to the American agriculturist that the currency of his country should be on the basis of the highest and most universally recognized measure of value as it is to the reputation of American farm products in all the world's markets that they be of the most desirable quality. . . .

If the American farmer, laborer, and manufacturer are compelled by law to submit to the measurement of the value of the products of their efforts by a silver standard, will not the foreigner in buying those products always use the same measure? With his beef, pork, and cereals, the American farmer *buys* money, and why should he not demand as superlative quality in that which *he buys* as the domestic and foreign purchasers insist upon, in that which *he sells*. If those buyers demand "prime" beef and "prime" pork, why should not the farmer demand "prime" currency, the best measure of value, the most fair and facile mediation of exchanges, in the most unfluctuating money which the world of commerce has ever evolved?²³

In addition to writing didactically in his annual reports on the currency question, Morton sought to instruct the public on the matter by the use of concrete examples. He formed the practice of paying in silver dollars those of his employees who were known to believe in free coinage. In this form, the payments usually bulked to considerable size. In fact, it was reported by the opposition that one old man had to hire a hack to get his monthly wages home.²⁴ The silver press denounced the Secretary as unfair and unreasonable. The Secretary, however, persisted in the practice, calling it "probably . . . the newest application of the homeopathic doctrine."²⁵

Though he was by no means a publicity seeker, such practices combined with his many interviews, kept Morton constantly before the public. As it became increasingly evident that free coinage

²³ Secretary of Agriculture, *Annual Report, 1894* (Washington, 1894), 74-75.

²⁴ Morton Scrapbooks.

²⁵ Morton Letterbooks.

would be the central issue of the next presidential campaign, both friends and enemies expressed the belief that the Secretary of Agriculture, because of his outspoken denunciation of anything but a straight gold standard, was a logical choice for a place on the national ticket put forward by the conservative Democrats.

During 1895 Morton's correspondence was filled with letters from men all over the country suggesting him as their choice for the Democratic nomination. Congressman Michael D. Harter, of Ohio, who was anxious to start a Morton boom for the presidency, wrote: "I would like to see the United States under your guidance for 8 years. I have a feeling that you could make such a record as would give you and your friends the greatest and most lasting satisfaction. . . . I never knew you to be unsound on any important thing and you are so clear concise and outspoken that no man is better fitted to lead the intelligent and the patriotic. . . ." ²⁶

Similar sentiments were expressed by many other prominent conservatives. A rather important section of the press looked favorably upon the Secretary of Agriculture as a presidential candidate. Among others, the *New York Evening Post*, the *Philadelphia Record*, the *Boston Herald*, and the *Portland Oregonian* spoke high praises of his personal and political record.²⁷ A widely circulated article by Henry McFarland, reviewed at length Morton's long and unflinching Democratic career, closing: ". . . if ability and integrity, courage and independence, experience and equipment, and a fine record, personal and political, are sought in 'a good western man,' I do not know where they can be better found than in Julius Sterling Morton of Nebraska." ²⁸

The *Omaha World-Herald*, an authoritative free-silver organ, expressed the opinion: "If, by any possibility, the goldbugs succeed in controlling the democratic convention in 1896, their ticket will probably be Cleveland and Morton. . . . If Mr. Cleveland could run for president and vice president both, the goldbugs would give him both nominations, but as it is necessary to select someone else to complete the ticket, a western man with eastern ideas will probably

²⁶ Harter to Morton, September 3, 1895.

²⁷ Morton Scrapbooks.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

be selected for the sake of appearances. Hon. J. Sterling Morton is the most probable candidate. . . ." ²⁹

The Atlantic devoted a preconvention article to "The Presidency and Secretary Morton." It contained a penetrating characterization of the Secretary of Agriculture:

. . . he has acquired the habit of mind of one always in the opposition, which for a man of courage readily takes the form of recklessness of speech. He has worked out the greater problems in a somewhat theoretical fashion, so that his convictions are not always based upon large information and experience; and once possessed of a conviction, he is undeterred by possible consequences from delivering it with an uncompromising earnestness. Uncalled upon during a long career to put his political principles into practice, he has had small need to adjust them to existing conditions; but when he has been required to act, his practical sense has been fortified by his speculative studies. . . . No amount of pressure would move him. His strong, well-set physique impresses one who meets him with an agreeable sense of the man's vitality and vigor. His hospitable nature is evident at once, and he makes friends quickly. . . . The astute politician who wishes to shape Mr. Morton to his own ends will encounter a difficulty in the honesty and shrewdness of the man. Mr. Morton himself is not an astute politician, and he never will manage conventions or intrigue for power. He is not built on those lines, and he will not be wanted by the Democratic party. Nevertheless, he has in him the sort of stuff out of which better Presidents than presidential candidates are made.³⁰

Morton was unaffected by the presidential talk. Whenever the possibility of his nomination was mentioned, he answered by stating that never again would he become a candidate for any political office. Moreover, he had not the slightest hope that he would ever be given the opportunity to accept or decline a Democratic nomination for either the presidency or the vice presidency—"how blind one's friends become to the Impossible and the Unattainable." ³¹ His preference for candidates to represent the Democracy in 1896 "would be found among a list of names containing Whitney, Olney, Morrison, Carlisle, and others equally well known to the country because of their abilities and high character as publicists." ³²

Morton's greatest political desire was that the Democracy declare its doctrines definitely on all occasions. "There is no future for the Democratic Party, except upon a platform declaring definitely for

²⁹ April 27, 1895.

³⁰ *The Atlantic*, LXXVII (March 1896), 393-394.

³¹ Morton to W. W. Catlin, August 11, 1895.

³² Morton to Miller, August 20, 1895.

commercial freedom and sound money," he wrote a *Western Democrat*. "The former means ultimate free trade and the latter means gold mono-metallism."³³

Meanwhile, he was concerned that an organization be perfected to carry the fight for sound money to a victorious conclusion. He wrote to Dr. S. A. Robinson, secretary of the executive committee of the Reform Club: "Unless the sound money forces of the New York Chamber of Commerce take this matter in hand and organize a disciplined army in behalf of Sound Money, I look for economic disasters next year, and possibly this winter."³⁴

³³ Morton to P. J. Smalley, St. Paul, Minnesota, November 10, 1895.

³⁴ Morton to S. A. Robinson, November 13, 1895.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

NEBRASKA FOLLOWS BRYAN AND POPULISM

ONE DID NOT NEED TO BE an astute political observer to see that the opinions of J. Sterling Morton, the Westerner who represented the agricultural interests of the country in President Cleveland's cabinet, were not those of a majority of the farmers of the West and South. That was evident in the angry demands from farm organizations and the farm press for his official head. It was further evident in the fact that leadership for the opposition to the Administration's policies, espoused with such fervor by Secretary Morton, came from the West—in fact, from the Secretary's own state of Nebraska.

The most conspicuous opposition to the President's request for the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, the first test of Administration financial policies, came from Congressman Bryan of the First Nebraska District, and Senator William Vincent Allen, the Populist whom Nebraska had just sent to the Senate. Bryan brought the House to his feet by a speech that outshone even his brilliant tariff effort of the session before, and raised him at once to a position of leadership in the Democratic Party.¹ Senator Allen, unabashed by the fact that he was a fledgling, led a filibuster against repeal in the upper chamber with a fifteen-hour speech—up to that time the longest oratorical effort on record in Congress.²

¹ Hibben, *The Peerless Leader, William Jennings Bryan*, 154.

² Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 312.

Senator Allen represented a party that had declared for free silver in every campaign since its organization. Congressman Bryan was a member of the party whose leaders were urging repeal of the Sherman law. He had been elected upon a platform supporting the President, and had run upon a ticket headed by the man who was now Secretary of Agriculture. Yet during the campaign Congressman Bryan had realized that the farmers of Nebraska were coming to favor the free coinage of silver, and had told them that he, too, was in favor of free silver.³ Moreover, he knew that he had been returned to Congress not by Democratic votes alone, but by the suffrage of a substantial number of Populists. If he could wrest control of the Democratic machine in Nebraska from the conservatives who had nominated Morton, he might be able to effect an amalgamation of Democrats and Populists that would sweep all else before it. At least, it appeared to be worth an attempt.

At the time of Cleveland's inauguration the Democratic Party in Nebraska was securely in the hands of the conservative supporters of Morton and the Administration. Euclid Martin, an Omaha paint manufacturer and a man who had large interests in the state's metropolis, was chairman of the State Central Committee. The national committeeman was Tobias Castor, of Crete. He had for years been one of the Burlington Railroad's trouble-shooters in the state, and though during the first Cleveland Administration he had been a member of the Miller-Boyd faction, he was now one of Morton's closest political and personal friends. Morton admired him as much as he did any politician in the state. The two men, as well as all other Democrats, well remembered the rocks upon which the party had run during the first Cleveland Administration because of the inability of the state chairman and the national committeeman to agree on the dispensation of federal patronage.⁴ Castor and Martin did not propose to repeat the mistakes of Boyd and Morton; and there was little danger that they would. They were both solidly behind the President, and determined to maintain unity in the party.

Yet it was clear to anyone who understood the situation that the

³ See p. 344.

⁴ See pp. 315-327.

party had within it the seeds of destruction in the person of Congressman Bryan. As the state's only Democrat in Congress, he naturally would have been expected to wield considerable influence in the choice of federal officeholders in Nebraska. The conservatives, however, realized from the beginning that if Bryan were allowed to exercise that control, he would use it as a club with which to beat down conservative influence in the party. Hence, they looked to Morton as the dispenser of the federal patronage.

It was a task for which Morton was poorly suited. He had never been a politician in the sense in which the word is commonly used. He had at times theoretically appreciated the value of the politician's arts, but had never been able to perfect them in his own practice. Such political preferment as he had received had come as a result of ability and energy in the advocacy of Democratic principles, and not as the result of guile. Moreover, Morton had the profoundest contempt for those who sought office for the sake of office itself. He had always held himself aloof from the appearance of candidacy for any office, and whenever he had been placed upon a Democrat ticket his campaign efforts were always for the inculcation of political doctrine rather than for the winning of votes. In fact, it often appeared to well-wishers that he went out of his way to drive votes to his opponents.

No sooner had the first wave of petitions for public office rolled in upon him than Morton was overwhelmed with disgust. It seemed that not only the Democrats of Nebraska but those of the whole Northwest held the opinion that the Department of Agriculture was a clearing agency for applications for post offices and all other federal positions.⁵ Morton answered virtually all applications for political aid, whether they came from men hardly known to him or men who had fought losing battles by his side for thirty years, with the statement that cabinet etiquette prevented him from recommending anyone for appointment in another department, unless asked by the head of that department. He referred them to National Committeeman Castor, State Chairman Martin and other members of the State Central Committee. Though much has been made by the various biographers of Bryan, and others, of the fact that Morton

⁵ Morton to Edward Campbell, Fairfield, Iowa, March 13, 1893.

held the federal patronage in Nebraska in the palm of his hand,⁶ about all he did in the matter was to turn his influence over completely to Castor and Martin. He trusted the two men and was willing if necessary to be held responsible for their appointments,⁷ yet he exerted little effort to influence their action, save to caution them that they recommend only men who in addition to being "sound" on the money and tariff questions, had reputations as men of high character and good business judgment.⁸

The time and energy that Morton could spare from the demands of his office he preferred to devote, as he always had done, to the discussion of general questions rather than to building up a personal machine in Nebraska. A letter to E. P. Weatherby, a Norfolk attorney, explained his position:

. . . I observe your kindly worded reference to myself in the closing paragraph of your letter, coupled with the suggestion that political offices should be distributed among the people of . . . Nebraska so as to make me many political friends. Of course, this is the common custom of men in public life who control offices, but I shall never adopt it in Nebraska or anywhere else. By this I would not have you understand that I favor a personal enemy or political enemy, instead of men of fidelity to principle, but I can not control the patronage of the state of Nebraska if I would, and I would not if I could. Experience teaches me that the men whom one serves best and for whom one secures offices, as a rule have defective memories, while those whom one defeats are blessed with memories as retentive of defeat as the sea is of fish and shells. . . .⁹

"For my own part," he wrote to a Lincoln friend, "I am too tired working ten to twelve hours a day to think much about the patronage in our state, and am quite content to leave it with the gentlemen who have the party organization in charge, with the faith that at the last you will harmonize all discordant elements, organize a militant Democracy, and finally achieve victory."¹⁰

It appeared for a while that the men with whom Morton was content to leave the party organization would prove able to bring about the desired results. It was true that Congressman Bryan was cooperating with Senator Allen in an attempt to stir up sentiment

⁶ Cf. Hibben, *op. cit.*, 154-155; J. C. Long, *Bryan, The Great Commoner* (New York, 1928), 66-67.

⁷ Morton to Brown, n.d., 1893.

⁸ Morton to Tobias Castor, May 20, 1893.

⁹ Morton to E. P. Weatherby, May 8, 1893.

¹⁰ Morton to N. S. Harwood, April 15, 1893.

against the Administration and at the same time secure Populist friends for himself;¹¹ but the adherents of the Administration thought they could hold the rank and file of the party closely in line. In anticipation of the coming state convention, in which it was conceded there would be a "big fight,"¹² Martin and Castor were in active and close correspondence with their partisans throughout the state. Every man who had been endorsed by the State Central Committee for an important post office was asked to come to Omaha in order that he might have "a very thorough understanding" of the course to be followed in the coming convention. Those who had received endorsements for the minor offices were not expected to make the journey to Omaha for a personal conference, but were sent letters, "setting forth the propriety of their coming as delegates to the convention, and the necessity of having none but Democrats on the delegation."¹³

All this Morton watched with interest and approbation, but he was not inclined to lend his aid to any great extent in the labor of getting the machine in working order for the convention.

"Had I time to write to friends in the various counties upon the subject of organization for sound money, in view of the coming State Convention, just as you suggest, I would do so," he wrote a member of the Democratic State Committee, "but it is impossible to attend to politics and the duties of this office at the same time. We must take our chances, and really I do not know as personally it is a matter of much consequence to me whether the people of this day and generation endorse my acts or my views. 'Truth is mighty and will prevail.' In coming times the money fallacies of today will be denounced as the witch-burnings of New England are now."¹⁴

At the assembling of the convention in Lincoln on October 4, it was evident that the organization had done its work thoroughly and well. Congressman Bryan, who had left his duties in Washington to return home and instruct the members of his party on the silver question, "went into the convention to serve as a firebrand, but had

¹¹ Cf. Miller to Morton, May 6, 1893; Frank P. Ireland, Nebraska City, to Morton, June 23, 1893; A. J. Sawyer to Morton, September 22, 1893.

¹² Castor to Morton, September 7, 1893.

¹³ W. D. McHugh, Omaha, to Morton, September 15, 1893.

¹⁴ Morton to Harwood, September 14, 1893.

not been on the floor an hour before he was drenched to the skin by cold water from the administration engines.”¹⁵

It was clear that the delegates were with the Administration. A motion by Bryan to substitute a silver man for T. J. Mahoney as chairman of the convention was defeated 390 to 106; a motion to put Bryan on the resolutions committee was turned down, 373 to 122.¹⁶ Despite a warning from Bryan that he would leave the party if it did not adopt his views, the convention passed a set of resolutions that gave enthusiastic endorsement to the Administration, and demanded the repeal of “that vicious law, the Sherman silver act.”¹⁷

Joyfully the administration men reported their success. Euclid Martin had never attended a convention in twenty years “in which the influence of organization was so apparent.” Bryan, he declared, “ought to take a tumble to himself.”¹⁸ James E. North, newly appointed collector of internal revenue, wrote: “The convention was the largest we ever held and was attended by the class of men who could not be run off from a principle through the eloquent appeals of a young Moses, much less Mr. Bryan.”¹⁹ Many did not wait upon letters, but telegraphed the good news to the Secretary of Agriculture. He, in turn, reported the President’s pleasure with the results.²⁰

It appeared that the Chevalier Bayard of free coinage, the young man who was out to wreck the President’s program in Congress and the President’s party in Nebraska, had been dealt with once and for all.

Any hope that Mr. Bryan had been put permanently out of the way, however, was founded upon water and sand. He went back to Washington asserting that he had been sacrificed upon the altar of gold and greed, that the Administration had packed the convention to beat him, and that he and not the delegates represented the true

¹⁵ *Nebraska State Journal*, October 5, 1893.

¹⁶ Morton-Watkins, III:254-255.

¹⁷ *Nebraska State Journal*, October 5, 1893.

¹⁸ Euclid Martin to Morton, October 5, 1893.

¹⁹ North to Morton, October 6, 1893.

²⁰ Morton to J. B. Sheean, Secretary of the Democratic State Central Committee, Omaha, October 7, 1893.

voice of Nebraska Democracy.²¹ He refused to support Frank Irvine, the convention's nominee for judge of the Supreme Court, and urged him to withdraw in favor of Silas A. Holcomb, the Populist candidate.²²

Although he had threatened to leave the party, and now supported the Populist candidates, Bryan remained a Democrat, hoping to amalgamate the Populists with his party in order to enable him to defeat the Administration's adherents.²³ The Administration hoped to prevent Bryan's success in this maneuver by bringing out as large a vote as possible for Judge Irvine.²⁴ So important was a good showing held to be, that Morton, for the only time during his four years in the cabinet, interfered directly in party action. He sent a letter to the chairman of every county Democratic committee in the state urging him to work against fusion and for Judge Irvine, "for the sake of the Bench, sound money, and the national influence it would help the Democrats of Nebraska to gain."²⁵ For the only time in his life he appealed directly to the railroads for political aid, writing Charles E. Perkins, president, and George W. Holdrege, general manager, of the Burlington, urging them to throw their influence behind Irvine.²⁶ All conservative efforts proved of little avail, however, for Irvine ran a poor third; and, as usual, a Republican was elected.²⁷ In some counties, Irvine's poor showing was attributed to the fact that the Democrats, fearing he could not be elected and not wanting the Republican candidate, Harrison, voted for Holcomb;²⁸ and in others, to the fact that Democrats fearing the same thing, but wanting to defeat Holcomb at any cost, voted for Harrison.²⁹ The election furnished strong evidence that despite the good showing at the convention, the party was not united on a con-

²¹ W. E. Annin in the *Nebraska State Journal*, October 15, 1893.

²² Castor to Morton, October 22, 1893.

²³ Hibben, *op. cit.*, 166.

²⁴ Castor to Morton, *loc. cit.*

²⁵ Morton Letterbooks.

²⁶ Morton to Perkins, October 29, 1893; Morton to Holdrege, October 29, 1893.

²⁷ The vote was: T. O. C. Harrison, Republican, 72,032; Silas A. Holcomb, Populist, 65,666; Frank D. Irvine, Democrat, 37,545; Ada M. Bittenbender, Prohibition, 6,357.—Morton-Watkins, III:256.

²⁸ W. M. Clary, to Morton, November 28, 1893.

²⁹ E. A. Coombs, Geneva, to Morton, November 10, 1893.

servative basis. The lack of unity was attributed to Bryan's policy of encouraging the Populists at the expense of the Democrats.³⁰

Another factor that worked against Democratic unity under conservative domination was the Administration's handling of the patronage in the state. In a large measure, it had been the hope of federal office that had kept the convention of 1893 in line. The actual dispensation of the offices, however, appears to have done more to disrupt than to unite the party. In the first place, the appointments in many cases were delayed so long as to cause dissatisfaction among would-be appointees.³¹ In the second place, positions often were given to men of whom the heads of the party organization in the state did not approve. Euclid Martin complained to Morton that of the five important positions in the state under the Treasury Department only one was filled with a man who had been endorsed by the Democratic State Central Committee and he had not had their unqualified endorsement. The Department of the Interior, likewise, had not followed the state committee's endorsements with any degree of regularity.³² In addition, there were complaints from various sources that important post offices were going to men who had not been endorsed by the regular Democratic organization in their localities.³³

The result of all this [Euclid Martin complained to Morton] is that our Party, although showing many elements of strength and Party discipline less than a year ago, is today a mass of disappointments. Fidelity to those in power has apparently been a barrier to political preferment, and under such circumstances there can of course be no successful organization. If true and pure friendship and fealty to person or power is a detriment to their advancement or success, the result must inevitably be that these traits of character will grow less. It is not an uncommon thing now to hear the remark that such a man will receive no favors at the hand of this administration because he has been its true friend; and your relation has been so close, being a part in fact of the administration, that what is true of the administration in a general sense is true as applied to yourself. The appointments are now practically made and what I say is said more in justification of what may follow than what has gone before. . . .³⁴

³⁰ Miles Zentmeyer, Schuyler, to Morton, November 13, 1893.

³¹ Castor to Morton, March 31, April 7, 1894.

³² Martin to Morton, April 4, 1894.

³³ Morton Mss.

³⁴ Martin to Morton, April 4, 1894.

The Administration's forces in Nebraska were further weakened by the increasing hard times.³⁵ Where one had turned away from Cleveland's standard because of disappointment at not receiving a political position, hundreds turned away because of the belief that the President's remedies were inadequate to solve the problem of deep and prolonged agricultural depression.

It was not necessary for Democrats disappointed for whatever reason in the Administration to leave the party, for within its ancient fold could be found one of the President's most vigorous antagonists. Congressman Bryan was letting neither the inept appointments nor the continuing low prices escape unnoticed.

Bryan had been instrumental in the organization of a Democratic Free Silver League, which proposed to convert Democrats to the monetary views of the Populists. The organization was active in the spread of its doctrine throughout the summer of 1894. It was clear that Bryan had changed his mind about leaving the party. He would seek to control it instead.

He took a long step toward achieving that control when on August 28, 1894, the *Omaha World-Herald*, the largest and most important Democratic paper in the state, announced that beginning September 1, William Jennings Bryan would be its editor-in-chief. The editorial policy, according to the announcement, was to be "mapped out by Mr. Bryan from time to time along the line of his well known political convictions."³⁶

William Jennings Bryan desired to be in the United States Senate. To put him there, the *World-Herald* began a strenuous campaign to deliver the forthcoming state convention to its recently acquired editor, who for his part, tirelessly stumped the state preaching his doctrine of free silver, and urging his Democratic brethren to send only men who believed in the cause to the state convention.³⁷

When the convention assembled in Omaha, it was evident that Congressman Bryan had done his work thoroughly and well. No sooner had Chairman Euclid Martin called the meeting to order, and according to long-established custom, recommended that the Democratic State Committee's nominee be elected chairman of the

³⁵ Morton-Watkins, III:260.

³⁶ *Omaha World-Herald*, August 28, 1894.

³⁷ See *Omaha World-Herald*, September, 1894, for Bryan's editorials, reports of Bryan's speeches, and accounts of county conventions.

convention, than a delegate was on his feet to put another name in nomination, Ed. P. Smith. Congressman Bryan, editor of the *Omaha World-Herald* who had been elected a delegate from Lancaster County, rose and said: "I think we might as well understand each other in the beginning. . . . We might as well commence the fight now. We have had conventions in which the chairman refused to recognize the majority. I want to say that any delegate who comes here instructed for 16 to 1 cannot disregard it. I ask those who are with me to vote for Ed. P. Smith."³⁸

Smith was elected by acclamation. The Democratic Party of Nebraska was in the huge and capable hands of Congressman William Jennings Bryan.

Congressman Bryan's plans for making himself a Senator soon unfolded. He had won the Democrats to the monetary doctrines of the Populists. Now he would win the Populists to his own senatorial standard by delivering the Democratic Party over to them. Under Bryan's guidance the convention voted complete fusion with the Populists, and Silas A. Holcomb, the Populist candidate for governor, was made the nominee of the Democratic Party. In addition to endorsing the Populist state ticket, the convention passed a resolution enthusiastically endorsing Omer C. Kem and William McKeighan, Populist congressmen. It seems that the only Democrat of prominence whom the party of Jefferson and Jackson was willing to endorse was Congressman Bryan, whose course in the House of Representatives, along with those of Kem and McKeighan, was praised, and whose candidacy for the Senate was given an official blessing.

Bryan's delivery of the party into the lap of the Populists shattered any hope of Democratic unity. Immediately upon the nomination of Holcomb by the silver-tongued orator, the supporters of the Administration got up and walked out of the convention hall. Under the leadership of State Chairman Euclid Martin, they held a rump convention in the cafe of the Paxton Hotel. They adopted a platform that declared for the gold standard and said: "We endorse the administration of Grover Cleveland as wise, patriotic and statesman-like and we congratulate him upon his selection of that sound democrat and economist, J. Sterling Morton, to a seat in his cabi-

³⁸ *Omaha World-Herald*, September 27, 1894.

net.”³⁹ They nominated a full ticket, headed by Phelps D. Sturdevant for governor, a man who just ten years before had been the first Democrat ever elected to a state office in Nebraska—that of state treasurer, on a fusion ticket, composed of Democrats and Anti-Monopolists, and headed by Morton.

During the campaign the Bryanites attempted to discredit Sturdevant and the straight Democrats by declaring that in view of the fusion of 1884, conservative opposition to fusion in 1894 was rank inconsistency. From the point of view of the conservatives, however, there was no inconsistency. Fusion of the Democrats with the radicals under the leadership of Morton tended to check the radicals, while fusion under the leadership of Bryan encouraged and strengthened them.

The results of the election told how serious was the plight of the conservative Democrats in Nebraska. Silas A. Holcomb was elected governor with a vote of 97,815, followed closely by the Republican candidate, T. J. Majors, who received a vote of 94,113. Sturdevant, the straight-Democratic candidate, received only 6,985.⁴⁰

Morton took no part in either the convention or the campaign, but spent the time vacationing in Europe with his sons, Joy and Paul Morton. From his earlier stand on the inadvisability of his interference in Nebraska politics no one had expected Morton to participate, but the conservatives were not able to accept with good grace what seemed to them to be their wholesale desertion by the Administration. Among the most aggressive of the supporters of the fusion candidate were federal employees, particularly those in Omaha. The conservatives were unable to see how the Administration could expect them to achieve any measure of success under the circumstances, and were inclined to despair of ever redeeming the party from Bryan and the free silverites.⁴¹

Bryan meanwhile was hard at work. He was not elected to the Senate, and so was without official place after his term in Congress expired March 4, 1895; but that did not bother him, for the removal

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Morton-Watkins, III:360.

⁴¹ Morton Mss., especially during November–December, 1894.

of official responsibilities only left more time and energy with which to preach the doctrine of the free coinage of silver at 16 to 1. All over the country went the young evangelist of the silver goddess. His congregations were large, his converts many, and if the believers themselves were not able to raise a large enough collection to reimburse the preacher for his efforts, outside sources, interested in the cause, often stood ready to make up the difference.⁴²

The young evangelist took his texts from a little paper-backed book, in hideous yellow, called *Coin's Financial School*, which in simple language and even simpler illustrations set forth the quantity theory of money. The book sold as fast as it could stream from the presses. Newsboys reported that it was easier to sell than newspapers.⁴³ Its influence was compared to that of Helper's *Impending Crisis* of the months just before the Civil War.⁴⁴

With the man who had control of their party spending his entire time extending the doctrine of free silver and his own reputation, and with the Administration seemingly unconcerned with their plight, the conservative Democrats in Nebraska could hardly believe that efforts "in . . . [their] little corner" could be worth while or productive of much good.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, they continued their work on behalf of the Cleveland Administration and the gold standard.

A Nebraska Sound Money League was organized in the spring of 1895. Though ostensibly nonpartisan, it was controlled by gold Democrats, and directed virtually all of its attention to breaking Bryan's hold on the Democratic Party. Strenuous efforts were put forth to make a success of the gold Democratic convention. Morton's advice and assistance were freely asked, and these he freely gave. He attempted to get Secretary of the Treasury Carlisle to appear before the convention,⁴⁶ and failing this, persuaded Congressman Michael D. Harter of Ohio to make the journey to Nebraska and speak on behalf of a sound currency.⁴⁷

The convention met in Lincoln on September 5. Notwithstanding the fact that the Bryan wing of the party had held what they

⁴² Hibben, *op. cit.*

⁴³ Robert A. Howard, Vicksburg, to Morton, May 19, 1895.

⁴⁴ John B. Furray, Omaha, to Morton, April 17, 1895.

⁴⁵ W. D. McHugh to Morton, April 1, 1895.

⁴⁶ Morton to John G. Carlisle, August 30, 1895.

⁴⁷ Morton to Martin, September 3, 1895.

called a Democratic State Convention in Omaha a week earlier, the conservatives proclaimed their meeting as the bona fide Democratic State Convention for Nebraska.⁴⁸ On the whole, the convention passed off to the satisfaction of its organizers,⁴⁹ and it was conceded, even by the free silverites, that the Administration's forces had been augmented during the past year.⁵⁰

The candidate for Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by the convention, T. J. Mahoney of Omaha, did not come close to election, but his vote of 18,636 was considerably larger than the 10,079 received by C. J. Phelps, the Bryan candidate.⁵¹ It was obvious that many Bryan Democrats had voted for the Populist candidate, Samuel Maxwell. Nevertheless, the Mahoney vote was encouraging. Morton wrote: "It places the Democracy on a respectable footing with Eastern people, and it raises the credit of the citizens individually and of the state collectively to see such an expression in behalf of sound finance where money fallacies have been preached so persistently, vehemently, and sonorously. . . . The election determined whom the Democratic organization in . . . [Nebraska] belongs to, and furthermore who shall represent the Democracy at the National Convention next year. . . ." ⁵²

Though Morton may have been able to express optimism over the situation in Nebraska, for months preceding the national convention, his letters were filled with words of discouragement over the future of the Democratic Party.

The truth is [he wrote to John P. Irish], that the silver fallacy has been growing in public estimation for the last six months. During that time the friends of a substantial and solvent currency have been rather indolent and inert. But the propaganda of the 16-to-1 crowd have penetrated every back county in Texas and all the other states with their fallacies and wind. It looks now as though they might carry the National Convention at Chicago. . . .⁵³

The leaders in Nebraska were just as apprehensive as was Morton. Added to their feeling that they had been neglected by the Adminis-

⁴⁸ *Nebraska State Journal*, September 3, 1895.

⁴⁹ McHugh wrote Morton: "It was the largest Democratic convention held in the state for many years and it was characterized by the spirit of enthusiasm which promises well for the cause of sound money in the State."—September 6, 1895. Others felt the same optimism.—Morton Mss.

⁵⁰ *Nebraska State Journal*, September 6, 1895.

⁵¹ Morton-Watkins, III:263.

⁵² Morton to D. P. Rolfe, Nebraska City, November 16, 1895.

⁵³ Morton to John P. Irish, San Francisco, March 14, 1896.

tration, was a growing belief that the Easterners in the party, by their inactivity, were handing the organization over to the free silverites. State Chairman Euclid Martin was "forced to conclude that the Democracy of the East must be either uninformed as to the situation in the West and South, or else they have abandoned all idea of keeping the Democratic party within proper and legitimate limitations so far as its policy upon the monetary question is concerned." He added:

I have about reached that point where I want to know what the intentions of the Party are. If there is no disposition to hold the Party in line, it is perfectly useless for us to go on in this State any further with our organization. We expect to be at the Convention in Chicago with a delegation of men sound upon all economic questions, representative of the character and best manhood of Nebraska. . . . And while we are expecting to do this, we should like to feel that we are going to meet some encouragement and that we are working in line with what is known as the sound money wing of the Party. If the South are all going to instruct their delegations to Chicago to vote for the sixteen to one idea, if all the Central States are going to do the same, leaving but two or three New England States favoring an honest money platform, it seems as though we would be simply inviting humiliation by appearing at the doors of the National Democratic Convention.⁵⁴

Despite forebodings of futility, however, the gold Democrats of Nebraska went steadily ahead with their plans. They held their convention in Lincoln, a week after the silver Democrats had elected delegates to the national convention, headed by William Jennings Bryan, who had urged that they not endorse him for the presidency because he wanted to go "as a fighter and not a figurehead."⁵⁵ The gold Democrats placed themselves squarely behind the Administration, and selected as delegates men who had long been known as Morton's close political friends. Heading the list was National Committeeman Tobias Castor. Included in the platform was a plank denying the claims of the silver delegates to seats in the national convention:

. . . because they have for years repudiated the national democratic party and its platform; they have insisted on withdrawal of democratic tickets in the interests of the populist party; they have refused to join in the nomination of democrats for office, but instead have endorsed and supported populist candidates, who accept none of the teachings of the democracy; they have sought and held office

⁵⁴ Martin to Morton, April 16, 1896.

⁵⁵ *Nebraska State Journal*, April 23, 1896.

by appointment from a populist governor as a reward for treachery to the democratic party; they have been repudiated by a two-thirds vote of the democrats of the state; they have, by public utterances in their recent convention, declared that if the national democratic convention refuses to adopt their peculiar populist notions they will not abide by its judgment and have sought to pave the way for the entrance to the populist national convention at St. Louis by the adoption of the most extreme of the many hair-brained theories of that party.⁵⁶

National Committeeman Castor went to Chicago several days before the rest of the delegation, proposing to use every influence at his command to seat the conservatives, no matter what the odds against them. Morton also was in the city somewhat in advance of the convention, but he could offer little hope to the Administration's adherents in Nebraska, for he conceded the complete triumph of the free coinage men.⁵⁷

The Nebraskans were amazed at the lack of fight evinced by the sound money men from the East. They reported disappointment bordering on disgust that the men to whom they had hoped to look for leadership "seemed to be entirely rattled by the free silver demonstration."⁵⁸ Plainly they had hoped for more from the conservative leaders who so bravely had come from the East in their special train.⁵⁹

Because the National Committee contained a majority of conservatives, the Administration delegation from Nebraska gained temporary seats in the convention. Those seats were very temporary, however. They were admitted on July 6, and upon the adoption of a report from the committee on credentials in favor of the silver delegation, they had to retire to the gallery, where, it had been announced, not without irony, seats had been provided for them.⁶⁰ A part of the delegation from Michigan was forced to retire with them.

Thus, the conservatives from Nebraska had met that "humiliation" at the hands of the national party which they had feared. They did not realize, as they took their seats in the gallery, how deep and complete their humiliation was to be. They could hardly have realized that the smiling young man who, with his associates, was

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, April 30, 1896.

⁵⁷ W. E. Annin in *Nebraska State Journal*, July 4, 1896.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ For a good account of the disconcerting of the conservatives, see Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, 698-704.

⁶⁰ *Nebraska State Journal*, July 9, 1896.

occupying their seats on the floor of the convention was, two days later, to emerge as the Democratic candidate for President of the United States.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

“THE VICTORY OF DEFEAT”

ALTHOUGH THE GOLD DEMOCRATS had been too demoralized at Chicago to take any action against the free silver forces, seven days after the convention, a committee, meeting in Chicago, issued a call convening gold Democratic committeemen in Indianapolis on August 7. This group, brought together only after great efforts, decided to hold a nominating convention at Indianapolis on September 2.¹

The decision to form a third party was not an easy one. It meant the severance of affiliations of long standing. This, particularly in the South, the ancient stronghold of Democracy, was to many unthinkable. Bryan was the nominee of the party, and Southerners, whose Democracy was traditional, accepted him no matter how much they might disagree with his views or those of the platform on which he stood. Typical of this group was Secretary of the Interior Hoke Smith who, though he had fought free silver before the convention, felt it his duty to support Bryan as the nominee of the party.² There was fear in the North that the organization of a third party would defeat its purpose and make Bryan's election possible; for though McKinley was distasteful, he was to be preferred to the young man from Nebraska.

¹ James A. Barnes, *John G. Carlisle, Financial Statesman* (New York, 1931), 464-471, contains a good account of the preconvention activities of the conservative Democrats.

² McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, The Man and the Statesman* (New York, 1923), II:229.

It might have been expected, of course, that the conservative Democrats, preferring McKinley to Bryan, would solve their problem by temporarily supporting the Republican nominee. This would have been almost as repugnant as sanctioning Bryan's nomination. As Morton wrote to his oldest son, Joy, "The Republican ticket is good enough for that kind of a ticket and the money plank good enough for that kind of a platform, though the record of Mr. McKinley (who voted for the Bland-Allison Act and for the Sherman Silver Purchasing Act) is not the record of a man who has fixed views upon finance. The platform is badly drawn, contradicts itself, and is so full of lies that everyone remarks upon its mendacity. . . ." ³

Men holding such views certainly could not be expected to enlist openly in behalf of the Republican candidates. Moreover, there was a strong desire to maintain an organization around the principles for which the conservatives stood. If they could not do that by acquiescing in the capture of the Democratic Party by Bryan and the free silverites, they most certainly could not do it by entering the party of the protective tariff.

For the men of the Administration the issues were particularly perplexing. They had been repudiated by the Chicago convention, and surely owed no allegiance to it; but beyond that they were at a loss to know what to do. It was the President's opinion that for a while none of them should say or do anything. He wrote Secretary of War Lamont: "We have a right to be quiet—indeed I feel that I have been invited to that course." ⁴ Cleveland's wishes on the matter were not to be followed by his advisers. Even before he had expressed them, Secretary Hilary Herbert had announced that he could not support the Chicago ticket; and in a short time Hoke Smith was to announce through the columns of his paper, the *Atlanta Journal*, that he could do no other than to support it.

It would have been virtually impossible for Morton to maintain silence, even temporarily. It was not his nature to withhold his opinions, for any reason, on even minor questions, and the issue which now faced the country was in his mind one of the gravest in its history. Hence, he spoke freely on Democratic duty. When

³ Morton to Joy Morton, June 26, 1896.

⁴ McElroy, *op. cit.*, II:226.

friends in Nebraska requested his advice, he wrote, without equivocation: "I think it the duty of every patriotic citizen to do all in his power to bring about the defeat of Mr. Bryan and those who support him and the platform upon which he stands."⁵ He made his position clear to President Cleveland:

. . . Bryan stands upon a platform which vituperates your administration for having preserved the financial credit of the Republic and denounces you and your cabinet for having maintained the authority of the United States at Chicago.⁶ The Chicago deliverance by the alleged Democrats in National Convention, is an indictment and for one I shall not plead guilty by voting for . . . [the] attorneys who prepared it.

In your own good time and manner I am confident that you will say the right words concerning the crisis through which we are now passing. Never before has the perpetuity of popular government been so jeopardized by fallacies and selfish demagoguery. . . .⁷

Morton had gone to Arbor Lodge immediately after the Chicago convention to spend his vacation, and from that place, in letters and interviews, his opinions had been so freely advertised that it was rumored he was seeking the nomination of the Indianapolis convention. A story sent out from Lincoln and given wide circulation stated that the Secretary of Agriculture had attended a conference with the gold Democrats of Nebraska and had agreed to write a letter announcing that he would accept the nomination.⁸

Nothing could have been more removed from the truth. Morton attended no conferences, except a social gathering in Omaha, and whenever he spoke of the Indianapolis convention in connection with himself it was to insist that under no circumstances should his name be presented for the nomination. He wrote to Albert Watkins, of Lincoln: "I frankly say to you—withstanding some too partial friends have mentioned my name in connection with the nomination to the Presidency by the National Democratic Convention—that under no circumstances can I think of accepting any such nomination, even if it should be tendered to me unanimously (which is an impossibility)."⁹

He explained his position further to Dr. George L. Miller:

⁵ Cf. Morton to Albert Watkins, August 24, 1896.

⁶ Refers to the use of federal troops during the Pullman strike of 1894.

⁷ Morton to Grover Cleveland, August 24, 1896.

⁸ Morton Scrapbooks.

⁹ Morton to Watkins, August 24, 1896.

. . . It is perhaps due to you to say that the alleged willingness of the writer hereof to accept the nomination of a Third Convention, which is to be held at Indianapolis on the 2nd of September, is an evolution of the newspaper mind. To all whom I have spoken or written I have declared with emphatic and sincere energy that I would not have that nomination if I could and probably could not have it if I would. During the last forty years I have endured candidatures enough to financially break up and politically destroy almost any plain Nebraska farmer, and I do not propose now, at almost 65 years of age to enlarge the field of sacrifice. The campaign of 1892, which shelved Van Wyck, put Crounse in the Gubernatorial office, and landed Allen in the Senate, cost me personally ten times (twenty or thirty times) as much as it cost any other individual in the state. And while I do not regret having made that fight for sound money, I am not anxious to make a similar one on a national scale which would be still more expensive, harrassing, and possibly intensely more mortifying in results. . . .¹⁰

He assured President Cleveland that not only had he refused to allow his name to go before the Indianapolis convention, but that, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding, he had no intention of attending the convention.¹¹

Although he wanted no official connection with it as a candidate, Morton was extremely interested in the National Democratic movement. He was fearful that the call for the convention had been postponed too long, "and that thousands of men who would have stood with us may have already gone over to the financial fallacies of Watson-Bryan-Tillman-Jones & Co. and that they are now beyond the reach of recall." Yet he had hope that the Indianapolis convention might be the means "of organizing the advocates of sound economics into a permanent political organization for the United States."¹² He thought that the time was propitious for "an honest, courageous organization of those Democrats who believe in a revenue tariff, honest dollars and the honorable carrying out of all contracts." In his opinion, their cause would be best served by dropping the word "Democratic" altogether from the name. According to his own taste, the word "Conservative" was preferable: "The need of the time is a new name as well as a new organization. 'Conservatives' are those who have something—either of property or good

¹⁰ Morton to Miller, August 25, 1896.

¹¹ Morton to Grover Cleveland, August 24, 1896.

¹² Morton to A. B. Farquhar, York, Pennsylvania, August 10, 1896.

name—which they desire to ‘conserve,’ to take care of, to perpetuate. . . .”¹³

The Indianapolis convention did not adopt a name in accordance with his views. Nevertheless, Morton was “exceedingly gratified” with the work done by the group, expressing at the same time, however, the belief that his refusal to allow friends to present his name for the presidential nomination was the wisest act of his entire public career.¹⁴ No one expected that the candidates of the third party, Palmer and Buckner, would come close to election. They had been placed in the field merely to help defeat “Bryanism,” as it was called by President Cleveland,¹⁵ or “Bryanarchy,” as it was called by Morton; and to give Democrats who adhered to the traditional teachings of the party candidates for whom they could conscientiously vote.

Morton did not wish to take an active part in the campaign, preferring to devote his time instead to the preparation of his last annual report.¹⁶ He had written to Euclid Martin, after reading Bryan’s acceptance speech: “The Madison Square Garden deliverance of the Popocratic candidate for the Presidency ought to beat any man for that office, and I have about concluded that if Mr. Bryan’s speeches themselves cannot defeat his election, it is then not worth while for other people to speak against him.”¹⁷

Morton made only one speech during the campaign. That was at Chicago, on October 9, under the auspices of the American Honest Money League. Taking as his subject “The Farmer and Finance,” he discussed the nature of money, credit, and wealth, and elucidated the reasons why farmers, in particular, should oppose the debasement of the currency. In the main, the presentation was rather technical for a political speech and the effort might have passed unnoticed amid the roll of oratorical thunder inundating the Republic, had not the speaker let his disgust with the course of the Southern Democrats prompt him to include in the middle of the speech a section on “Confederate Finance.” That section made Morton’s Chicago speech one of the most-discussed conservative

¹³ Morton to North, August 29, 1896.

¹⁴ Morton to Emma Morton, September 4, 1896.

¹⁵ McElroy, *op. cit.*, II:225.

¹⁶ Morton to Emma Morton, October 3, 1896.

¹⁷ Morton to Martin, August 14, 1896.

efforts of the entire campaign. He presented the financial background of the Confederate failure as a practical example of the infeasibility of experimentation with the currency. His speech still might have passed unnoticed had he not added:

. . . Is it possible that some southerners are still unreconstructed and disloyal? Can it be that Vest, Harris, Morgan, Pugh and other ancient giants of the confederacy aim to accomplish by a false finance that which they failed to bring about by arms—the dishonor and destruction of this republic? Are the same logicians who advocated secession for the southern states in 1861 and are now fervidly declaiming for free-silver still thinking of their "first love?" . . .¹⁸

The speech was telegraphed all over the country. Everywhere the statement regarding confederate finance appeared under scare headlines. The Democratic press railed at Secretary Morton for his attempt to revive the bloody shirt in American politics. At Alexandria, Virginia, he was hung in effigy with a card bearing the transcription: "Secretary Morton, a traitor to his party. Compliments of Alexandria Democracy." ¹⁹

Thus, Morton's speaking career during the campaign, if brief, was stormy. Amidst an editorial and oratorical whirlwind, he plunged into the preparation of his last annual report. Although he did not again take the platform he wrote long and frequent letters to conservatives in the West urging them to their greatest efforts to prevent the election of Bryan. As election day approached, his letters became more frequent, and he more fearful of the outcome. He awaited the returns "as one watches by the bedside of a very sick relative or friend when physicians are divided as to whether the patient may die or live." ²⁰

"Probably I am more intense," he wrote Dr. George L. Miller, "because I have been here long enough to know that it requires a cool head, great deliberation and a sound judgment for the Chief Executive of this Republic, who must thoroughly understand all its domestic interests and industries, its political and its social fabric, and at the same time be alert, vigilant and sagacious as to its relations with all the other countries on the globe. . . . Knowing these things, the possibility of the right, interests and good name of this

¹⁸ J. Sterling Morton, "Farmer and Finance," Pamphlet published by American Honest Money League (Chicago), 8. Morton Collection.

¹⁹ *New York Telegram*, October 17, 1896.

²⁰ Morton to Miller, October 29, 1896.

Republic being committed to the care of such people as Bryan's election would necessarily put at the head of affairs, is appalling." ²¹

A few days after the election, Euclid Martin wrote Morton a long letter in which he discussed the campaign in Nebraska. Bryan had carried his home state by about 13,000 votes. This Martin attributed primarily to the poor campaign conducted on the part of the Republicans. He declared that the only effective work against Bryan had been done by the sound money Democrats, who brought General Sickles, Bourke Cochran, and John P. Irish to the state. He concluded:

. . . Still I suppose we all ought to congratulate ourselves, and I think that is the general disposition. People find less fault with the blunders in the state in view of the splendid victory achieved in the nation. Not the victory of success but the victory of defeat. People talk all over the country about the shops and factories starting up, and wholesale houses starting out their traveling men because of McKinley's election, when the facts are that all of this is being done because of Bryan's defeat and not because of the election of anybody. . . .²²

Morton, too, rejoiced in the "victory of defeat." He had never been enthusiastic about McKinley and had accepted him only as the alternative to Bryan.

The last months of Morton's official life were uneventful. The pressing work of the position had been done. There was little that could be accomplished save to get the office in shape to turn over to the next Secretary of Agriculture. There was some effort among Nebraskans to make Robert W. Furnas Morton's successor, but it hardly developed into "boom" proportions, even within the state. President McKinley went to Iowa to select the representative of the farming interests in his cabinet, choosing James W. Wilson of Ames. Morton found that he was "a good, kindly-disposed man of far more than ordinary intellectual force, and that if he is supported by a properly qualified assistant to succeed Dr. Dabney, he will do good work in the coming four years, if he has his health." ²³

Morton's own good work as Secretary of Agriculture, particularly that in behalf of civil service, was recognized in various quarters in

²¹ *Ibid.*, October 30, 1896.

²² Martin to Morton, November 10, 1896.

²³ Diary, March 2, 1897.

the months just before he left office. Theodore Roosevelt praised his "manful work for civil service reform."²⁴ The Secretary was invited to tell of civil service in the Department of Agriculture at a civil service reform dinner given in Philadelphia. Carl Schurz, also on the program, declared that Morton's speech was the best effort on behalf of civil service reform that he had ever heard.²⁵

Morton's chief concern, however, during the months between the election and the inauguration was to close up his work honorably and return as soon as possible to Arbor Lodge.

He wrote to Charles E. Perkins:

. . . Never before have I fully appreciated the value and comforts of my own home as I do now, by contrasting its quiet and freedom with the hurly-burly of the social functions and the emptiness of this political center. There my friends came to see me and were always welcome because I sincerely desired their association; and so I went to their homes. . . . and we had genuine satisfaction out of our social exchanges. Everything about them was real and not pretended. Here society consists largely in introducing people to each other who do not care to become acquainted, and in polite lying, and assuring people that you are delighted to meet them when you do not care a D --- about it, and you know they do not care any more about seeing you, and then in drinking tea and exchanging small twaddle and criticising each other's manners and costumes, abilities and characteristics. Of such trifles modern society is profuse, and there is very little in it to attract a plain farmer like the undersigned. Therefore, as you suggest, I will leave this position without reluctance. In it I have endeavored to make a record which neither my friends nor family need be ashamed of. By hard work and close attention to details, I have managed to put down some of the paternalistic tendencies of this Department which had been a nursery for everything in the way of class legislation which you and I antagonize and reprobate. But there is a great deal left for my successor to accomplish in that line, as well as in the line of discipline among employees. During four years I have covered back into the Treasury, out of lesser appropriations than were given to my predecessor, more than two millions of dollars. Of course, among people who talk of millions as our ancestors did of hundreds such a sum may appear insignificant. But when one considers that it would take 2,000 extraordinarily sagacious and industrious farmers at least a whole year to earn that amount of money, it is not so very insignificant. . . .²⁶

Inauguration day came midst anxieties for the health of his sister, Miss Emma Morton, who had been stricken with pneumonia during the winter and seemed unable to throw it off. Her illness had

²⁴ Theodore Roosevelt to Morton, November 23, 1896.

²⁵ Morton to Paul Morton, December 12, 1896.

²⁶ Morton to Perkins, January 25, 1897.

necessitated the cancellation of Morton's last cabinet dinner, which in turn was to be the last social function of the President's official family.

Morton was at the White House at ten o'clock on the morning of the fourth of March. The President "delighted" him by refusing to sign a special agricultural appropriation bill, making it possible for him to say, "and thus we have never disagreed."²⁷ About eleven o'clock President Cleveland and President-elect McKinley started for the capitol followed by all of President Cleveland's cabinet, except Secretary of State Olney who had been called out of the city, and a vast military and civic procession. At the capitol all were shown into the Senate chamber where they witnessed the inauguration of Vice President Hobart and the qualification of a number of newly elected senators. Then all went out upon the east front to witness the inauguration of President McKinley, "but Secretaries Carlisle, Lamont, P. M. G. Wilson, Sec. Francis and Attorney Gen Harmon & the writer hereof walked away and homeward."²⁸

On March 11, Morton started "Arbor Lodge-ward, gleefully!"²⁹ He stopped over in Chicago, and there, at the home of his oldest son, Joy, had dinner with his four sons. The cares and tribulations of office dropped easily from his shoulders. It was the first time he had been with all four sons at once since he had taken his oath of office four years earlier. He wrote in his diary: "I am indeed a proud and happy father. Four such sons as Joy, Paul, Mark and Carl Morton are seldom given to a human home. But their Mother was superb. . . . And if the sons are as fond of the parent as he is of them each one was happy, though I am sure each remembered Caroline Joy French Morton during the meal and mourned her death."³⁰

Well Morton might have been proud of his four stalwart sons. Each had succeeded in a measure that more than fulfilled his fondest expectations. The success of all had been based upon those traits of character which their father had always admired, and had sought to inculcate in them—honesty, thrift, diligence.

²⁷ Diary, March 4, 1897.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, March 11, 1897.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, March 20, 1897.

Joy Morton, the eldest, had, after his long illness, given up his banking position with the Nebraska City Bank, and gone into the railroad business. In 1879, he was assistant to the storekeeper of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railway Repair Shop at Aurora, Illinois. The same year he was employed by Haskins, Martin and Wheeler, of Chicago, agents for the Michigan Salt Association. A short time later he was asked by E. I. Wheeler to enter the firm as a junior partner. The Michigan Salt Association sold salt produced by sawmills which burned their waste under evaporators. The frugal Joy Morton had saved the \$5,000 required as capital, and, after careful analysis, entered the firm, which became E. I. Wheeler and Company. In 1885, Mr. Wheeler died suddenly, and the firm became Joy Morton and Company, with Mark Morton as the principal "company." The force and energy of the young Mortons soon made this firm the leader of all the agencies of the salt association. As the great Michigan lumber mills cut up their timber and closed, the Mortons built coal-burning salt works and the business continued to develop until the words "Morton" and "salt" became almost synonymous throughout the West. Joy Morton engaged in many other activities of both a business and civic nature, and became a great and respected figure in American business. His business ability made him, even as a young man, the financial backbone of the family and he was always willing to assist his father or his brothers in their various business ventures. The love of trees, inherited from his father, led him to found and endow the Morton Arboretum, west of Chicago. It is world-renowned as a great outdoor laboratory and museum, where woody plants are carefully studied for their economic and artistic values.

Paul, the second son, who later was to become Secretary of the Navy under Theodore Roosevelt, and president of the Equitable Life Assurance Society in New York City, was then vice president of the Atchison, Topcka and Santa Fe Railroad, continuing the brilliant career begun as a boy with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. Paul Morton, who died at the age of fifty-five, was in some ways the most spectacular of the four sons, and was in the public eye on many occasions. In his early thirties, for instance, he had charge of the public relations of the Burlington Railroad during the great Burlington strike and so conducted himself that he had the respect

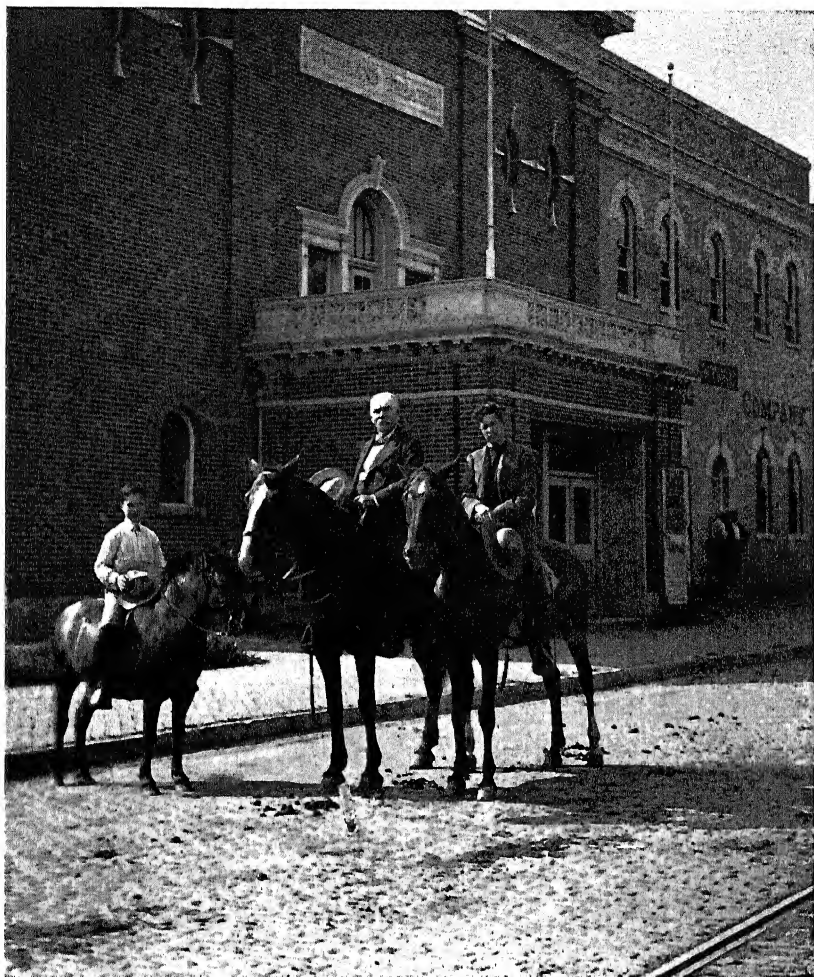
and confidence not only of his employers, but of the press, the public, and even the strikers themselves. His close friendship with Theodore Roosevelt led to his appointment as Secretary of the Navy. He knew little of either politics or ships. He is reported to have said, on first boarding a man-of-war, "Gosh, it's hollow!" He was appointed to the cabinet, because Roosevelt recognized that in him he would have a close and trusted friend who knew the railroad business thoroughly and would be able to give practical advice in handling the vexatious railroad problem. The same confidence in Paul's ability and integrity led to his choice as president of the Equitable following the insurance scandals of 1904-05.

The tastes of the third son, Mark, were always very strongly turned toward agriculture. In the salt business he was the extremely effective and forceful lieutenant of his elder brother, Joy, and later achieved success in a different business in his own right. He always had a farm or two, has always been intensely interested in fine horses and cattle, and prefers the rural life to all others. He was much more of a "dirt" or practical farmer than his father, and his own knowledge of practical values in agriculture, which later was to win high recognition, served to balance his father's more theoretical approach.

Carl, the youngest son, was then manager of the Argo Starch Works in Nebraska City, of which he had been the practical founder. Local capital as well as that of the family had been invested in the venture, and it was doing well. Carl later moved to Waukegan, Illinois, to take over the management of a large starch, glucose, and corn sugar factory which had been acquired by his brother Joy, and he was successfully operating it at the time of his death in 1901.

In addition to their business abilities, all of the sons possessed strong, rugged characters. Any one of them was outstanding in any company in which he found himself, and when all together, they gave the impression of great virility and unbounded energy. Above all, they truly fulfilled their father's oft-expressed hope that they might be worthy of the memory of their mother.

With Carl, who had come from Nebraska City for the dinner, Morton left Chicago for Arbor Lodge. There he found all "in good order." Happy to be at home, he spent most of two days arranging



WIRT MORTON

STERLING MORTON

J. STERLING MORTON

"THE ROUGH RIDERS"
1901

MORTON AND TWO GRANDSONS IN FRONT OF THE
OVERLAND THEATRE

In the background is the building which housed *The Conservative*

Ned. C. Abbott,

Oaks thrive in the tempest
that would rend them, and
draw nutriment from the
howling storms. Here, I
right fibre, as like oaks
and develop best in
antagonisms; and by constant
attrition with adverse criticism,
and harsh opposition, establish
at last, good name and high
Character. Your friend

Arbor Lodge

Sunday morning

September 11th 1892

Wm. H. Norton

A DEDICATION TO N. C. ABBOTT OF NEBRASKA CITY
THEN A HIGH-SCHOOL LAD AT FREMONT, NEBRASKA
ON THE FLY-LEAF OF THE BOOK, "ARBOR DAY,"
BY ROBERT W. FURNAS

the many books he had sent from Washington, and hanging in his library pictures of his colleagues in the cabinet.

A few days after his arrival, Nebraska City's new public library was dedicated. The event held special significance for Morton. The building had been constructed for the city by his oldest son, Joy—"How I wish his Mother could have lived to witness his success and his active generosity towards the town which she and I hoped to see grow into a city. But she lives in him and in Paul and Mark and Carl and they honor her in their character and lives." ³¹

The next evening his fellow townsmen tendered him a reception at the Grand Pacific Hotel. He was welcomed home by Judge M. L. Hayward, shortly to be elected a Republican United States Senator. Guests were present not only from Nebraska City, but from Omaha, Lincoln and other towns in the state.

On Arbor Day, April 22, his sixty-fifth birthday, Morton went to Omaha to speak at the laying of the cornerstone of the administration building of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. That evening a large reception was tendered him at the Omaha Club. General Manderson who had been elected senator in 1883 when the Democrats had failed to agree on Morton,³² delivered the speech of the evening, which was "very complimentary and gratifying." Letters were read from Grover Cleveland and Richard Olney in praise of Morton's career as Secretary of Agriculture. The evening was "memorable." Morton was "quite overcome." ³³

During the spring of 1897, Morton spent much time with the trees of Arbor Lodge, and riding around Otoe County, viewing his land and that of his sons. He was convinced that rural life in Otoe County was "not so unattractive as often depicted by calamity cacklers." ³⁴

A life of relative leisure at Arbor Lodge, however, no matter how pleasant, would not have been completely satisfactory. Morton was the gold Democratic nominee for regent of the State University in 1897, and in the fusionist triumph was badly defeated. He had been well aware that the election of McKinley by no means solved the problems before the country. It merely prevented their immediate

³¹ Diary, March 26, 1897.

³² See p. 281.

³³ Diary, April 22, 23, 1897.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, April 2, 1897.

attempted solution by William Jennings Bryan. Moreover, there was always the danger that Bryan might yet be in a position to apply his solutions.

"The truth is that the work for an Honest Currency must be kept up with vigor all along the line, and particularly in the West," Morton had written to Edward Atkinson, before leaving office. "The owners of the silver mines have not given up the contest. They are contributing with great liberality to maintain an army of propagandists. They have subsidized great numbers of country newspapers. The patent insides are filled with the vagaries and fallacies of Bryanism."³⁵

Morton's observation of William McKinley's first few months in the White House made him all the more convinced that conservative Democrats, the men who supported Grover Cleveland's Administration, should continue in vigilance. The contrast between Cleveland and McKinley only further confirmed him in his views on the importance of effective work in behalf of conservative Democratic principles. He expressed his opinion of the two presidents in a letter to Thomas F. Bayard:

From Grover Cleveland to William McKinley in a single step is the longest stride that current history has taken during the present century. And the worst indication of all is that the American people are not yet capable of observing the striking antithesis between the ability, the patriotism and the courage of Cleveland, on the one side, and the puerility, partisanship and cowardice of McKinley on the other side. And people so slow to distinguish between these two Presidents of the United States can hardly tell adamant from putty, mountains from mole-hills, or gold from brass. . . .³⁶

The political situation, for one of Morton's views, was not encouraging. He had earned retirement from the country's political wars, but retirement he found impossible. By midsummer the course of his declining years had been decided. He expressed his determination in a letter to Judge Allen Blacker of El Paso, Texas, a former Nebraska pioneer and an old friend: "For my own part, I am ready to enter upon this fight and remain in it during all of my natural life, whether victory or defeat come to the cause."³⁷

³⁵ Morton to Atkinson, February 5, 1897.

³⁶ Morton to Bayard, February 24, 1898.

³⁷ Morton to Allen Blacker, July 25, 1897.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

"*THE CONSERVATIVE*"

AS A MEANS OF CONTINUING and increasing the agitation against free silver, the National Sound Money League was organized in 1897. It developed out of the Honest Money League of America, with headquarters in Chicago, and a similar group in New York. These organizations had done heroic work during the campaign of 1896 and were credited with conspicuous parts in the defeat of Bryan in Illinois and the Empire State.¹ The two groups merged in order to carry their propaganda to all parts of the Union.² The league elected George E. Leighton of St. Louis as its president. A. B. Hepburn of New York, a former comptroller of the currency, was elected treasurer, and E. V. Smalley of St. Paul, a former newspaper man, secretary. Vice presidents were elected from each state in the Union. Morton was chosen from Nebraska in the hope that he would be "willing to cooperate . . . for the furtherance of the object to which . . . [he] devoted such distinguished service during . . . [his] term of office as Secretary of Agriculture."³

Morton accepted the office, but he discovered that like most vice presidencies it carried with it little of responsibility or duty. His duties were considerably increased when at the first general meeting of the vice presidents of the organization, in March 1898, he was elected president of the National Sound Money League to suc-

¹ *New York Evening Post*, February 25, 1897.

² *New York Times*, February 26, 1897.

³ Gustav H. Schwab, *New York*, to Morton, March 9, 1897.

ceed George E. Leighton. The other officers were retained, except that M. E. Ingalls of Cincinnati succeeded Gustav Schwab as chairman of the executive committee.

Immediately upon his election Morton set out to vitalize the work of the organization. It had been rather successful in obtaining contributions, particularly from Chicago capitalists, and expended between five hundred and one thousand dollars a month⁴ for the maintenance of its Chicago headquarters, and the publication and distribution of a paper called *Sound Money*, edited by Secretary E. V. Smalley. This, however, was not enough to satisfy Morton. It was his opinion that if the work of the league was to be successful the fight for sound money must be carried to "the enemy's country," the states of the West. To do this, he urged the secretary to correspond with a prominent gold Democrat and a prominent gold Republican in each county and from them get the names of all free-silver men in each county, and also names of men who were undecided in their convictions. Once in possession of such a list of names, Morton thought, it would be possible to conduct a systematic and successful campaign on behalf of a sound currency.⁵

There is no record showing whether or not the suggestion was followed. It probably was not, for most of the officers of the Sound Money League do not appear to have shared Morton's views on the importance of the Western states. They were inclined to concentrate their attention upon the more populous states of the eastern Middle West and the East. Moreover, Morton soon found that he disagreed with Secretary Smalley regarding the solution of many of the problems facing the league. Most of these disagreements were slight, but they added up to a mutual irritation. In any event, although Morton was re-elected president in 1899, he soon became absorbed, to the virtual exclusion of the league's affairs, in his own efforts on behalf of sound money and conservative economics in general.⁶

⁴ Secretary's Report, June 1, 1898 (Morton Collection).

⁵ Morton to E. V. Smalley, March 28, 1898.

⁶ The National Sound Money League maintained its existence until 1900. At that time the death of Secretary Smalley combined with the impending passage of a "qualified currency reform bill" by Congress resulted in the decision to disband the organization. Cf. Morton to Henry Villard, January 13, 1900; Villard to Morton, January 22, 1900.

At the time of his first election to the presidency of the National Sound Money League, Morton was considering the publication of a weekly paper in Nebraska City. He had no hope of making money from such an enterprise. On the contrary, his ambitions for the paper were so high that he realized that it would be a struggle to make it self-sustaining. The project attracted him because it would furnish an agreeable occupation for his declining years, and at the same time give an opportunity for the discussion of political, economic, social, and other questions that appealed to him. He also thought that such a paper would be effective in the spread of propaganda for a sound currency, because, in his opinion, "the doctrines of honest money, printed in paragraphs on the west bank of the Missouri, originating with a citizen of the West, would have far greater influence than anything bearing the imprint of the East, which would be charged up to 'plutocratic designs.'"⁷

Morton proposed, however, that if he were "to preach in this financial wilderness the Gospel of an Honest currency for an honest people," he should receive the support of those who had a stake in the gold standard and the triumph of conservative doctrines. Consequently, soon after he had definitely decided to publish the paper and with his sons had incorporated the Morton Printing Company, he wrote the presidents of his old friends, the railroads, in whose behalf he had worked more than two decades before, informing them of his intention and inviting them to aid him and the cause by subscribing for large numbers of copies to be distributed free among the economic heathen of the West.⁸ The Western roads came quickly to the aid of the project. The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy led off with a subscription for one thousand copies. The Union Pacific and the Chicago and Northwestern also subscribed for one thousand copies each. The Illinois Central subscribed for five hundred copies.⁹ The advertising department of each road sent Morton a list of persons living along its tracks to whom it wished the paper sent and those so indicated received it free of charge.

It was Morton's hope that the paper he was about to establish would be the Western counterpart of *The Nation*, founded in 1865.

⁷ Morton to Joy Morton, March 22, 1898.

⁸ Morton Letterbooks.

⁹ Morton Collection.

Edward Atkinson, the well-known liberal journalist who had been one of the founders of *The Nation*, enthusiastically commended the project, writing that Morton was just the man who could give the country an organ of discussion from the Middle West and command for it national attention. He warned, however, that the founders of *The Nation* had lost sixty thousand dollars during the first year of publication.¹⁰ That, of course, was one aspect of *The Nation's* career which Morton had no desire to emulate and hoped to avoid, backed by his financial support.

In all his negotiations prior to publication and even in the prospectus, Morton referred to the proposed paper as *The Dynamo*. Just before the publication of the first issue, however, and probably at the suggestion of Edward Atkinson who thought the name "Dynamo" would give the impression that it was a technical paper, the name was changed to *The Conservative*. Grover Cleveland's Secretary of Agriculture could not have chosen a more fitting name under which to discuss public affairs.

The first number of *The Conservative*, "A Weekly Journal devoted to the Discussion of Political, Economic and Sociological Questions," was issued from the newly constructed office of the Morton Printing Company on Thursday, July 14, 1898. Morton's four sons, and particularly Joy, had furnished much of the capital on which the paper was started. After the first issue, they enthusiastically gave their father encouragement to continue the publication. One reason why they encouraged the paper was that they wanted to give their father an occupation that would keep him interested and busy at home. He had just received a splendid offer from the government of Argentina to spend a year there for the purpose of organizing a Department of Agriculture.¹¹ The sons were afraid that his health would not sustain the trip and extended residence in South America.

The journal was "conservative" in format as well as in content. After the manner of *The Nation*, the reading matter was presented in three columns under short, machine-set headlines. The first page of the first number contained a statement of purpose; and the con-

¹⁰ Atkinson to Morton, June 9, 1898.

¹¹ Estaniscas S. Zeballos to Morton, July 27, 1898.

tent was typical of the issues that were to come every Thursday for the next four years.

According to the statement of purpose, *The Conservative* had been established and was to be published "in the interest of the conservation of all that is deemed desirable in the social, industrial and political life of the United States." Specifically, this, according to the editor, meant that *The Conservative* would "advocate the conservation of public funds by rigorous honesty and frugality in the administration of precinct, town, city, county, state and national affairs . . . declare for and stand up for equal rights to all the intelligent citizenship of the republic . . . recognize no attempted division of American citizens into antagonisms by which designing men endeavor to separate Americans into 'plain people' and 'rich people,' into 'laboring classes' and 'capitalistic classes' . . . treat all Americans as laborers, either with hands or heads—doing either manual or mental work—or both . . . defend the rights of labor . . . respect the rights of capital . . . contend that capital without labor or labor without capital is as incapable of producing prosperity as eggs are incapable of producing chickens without incubation . . . protect the rights of individual citizens, likewise proclaim and defend the rights of de-individualized corporations . . . declare for the continuance of the single gold standard in the monetary system of the government of the United States . . . combat the free coinage of silver at 16 to 1 . . . contend that the relative value of coins made of silver and gold depends, not upon an enacted ratio, but upon the relative market value of the silver and gold bullion which those coins contain . . . publish from time to time the legends and traditions of the primitive prairies and plains of the great West . . . candidly consider, debate and elucidate railroads and the other power agents and methods of facilitating the exchanges and the products of one part of the country for those of another part of the country, or for exchanging by transportation the industrial output of one nation for the results of the labor of another nation, without bias, without prejudice, and with the single desire and sole intent of finding the truth, declaring it and fighting for it. . . ." ¹²

The first number of the paper indicated that the statement of purpose was to be followed closely. The leading article was entitled

¹² *The Conservative*, I:1, July 14, 1898, 1.

"Riches and Capital." It pointed out that riches and capital were nothing but the result of industry and thrift, and that they were essential to the development of any community. Those who condemned accumulated riches were "not gifted with any intense desire for productive employment. As a rule, they sit at street corners and whittle and damn everybody who does not also whittle and condemn thrift wherever it appears." The first issue also contained two articles on the coinage question, one on the value of railroads, one on the early agricultural development of Nebraska, and two on tree planting. In addition, there were many short paragraphs, most of them relating to the monetary question.

Throughout its existence the magazine maintained the tone established by the first issue. It was not a news magazine, but a journal of discussion, hence it took but slight cognizance of current events, except in a general way. Among the contributors were men distinguished in the fields of politics and letters: Edward Atkinson, Professor J. Laurence Laughlin of the University of Chicago, Professor William Graham Sumner of Yale, Edwin Burritt Smith, Carl Schurz, Dr. George L. Miller, and Robert W. Furnas. Morton himself wrote many articles, in addition to the editorials, and friends could see his earmarks on every page,¹³ for almost every issue was spiced with the editor's keen wit. The business side of the paper was handled by John Nordhouse, who had been Morton's private secretary in Washington. The editor was always on the lookout for a young man to help him with the editorial work, but was unable to find one who was wholly satisfactory. He thought seriously of attempting to get the services of a brilliant young man who had just written an editorial entitled "What's the Matter with Kansas," but was afraid that such a man would never be willing to settle in a small Western town. In this he proved mistaken. The young man was William Allen White.

Morton realized that he was fighting not merely free silver, a lack of respect for the courts, or the desire to regulate business. He saw clearly that the struggle between radicals and conservatives was one between the individual and the group, or the smaller and the larger unit. All during his active life Morton had leaned to the side of the

¹³ Cf. David S. Barry to Morton, December 23, 1898, for a long and friendly criticism of *The Conservative*.

individual. As a student he had resisted the authority of the university corporation; as a youthful legislator he had inveighed against the right of the territory to enter the sphere of private banking; during the Civil War he had looked upon the temporary suspension of individual rights as almost worse than secession itself; all during the post-war period of agrarian discontent he had championed the individual and the corporation against regulation by the state. He firmly believed that if it were possible to inculcate in the people an appreciation of the value of individual development, and a desire to cultivate it, much of the battle against those who advocated increased state controls would be won. To that end he wrote frequently of the value of individual enterprise. He devoted one issue of *The Conservative* to a symposium on the question "What Are the Young Man's Chances?" Leaders in business and the professions contributed articles. Virtually all of them emphasized the importance of the individualistic doctrines of thrift, industry, and honesty.¹⁴

Morton was fond of writing of the humble origin of wealthy and famous men. Under the title, "The Common People," he showed that the wealthy men of the Eighteen-nineties were only the poor, hardworking boys of an earlier generation who by the application of industry, thrift, and honesty had worked themselves to the top. These articles served a double purpose. They pointed out to youthful readers the importance of individual development if they were to succeed, and they showed that those who condemned great wealth really agitated against the ancient virtues.

In the midst of its attempt to teach fundamentals, *The Conservative* by no means forgot the epitome of all it deemed dangerous in American politics—the person of William Jennings Bryan. Morton hated Bryan as he had no other man in a half century of political life which had aroused more than its share of enmity. That hatred was in part personal. All during his life in Nebraska, except on infrequent occasions, Morton had been the acknowledged leader of the Democracy of the territory and the state. Bryan, a struggling young lawyer who might ordinarily have been expected to be content for many years with the crumbs that fell from the table, within a short time after his arrival in Lincoln had got control not only

¹⁴ *The Conservative*, IV:5, August 15, 1901.

of the Democratic Party in Nebraska but of the Democracy of the nation. The meteoric success of the young Bryan was a bitter pill to the old man who had for years led forlorn Democratic hopes, without reward, or hope of reward.

On the whole, however, Morton's hatred of Bryan was no mere personal thing. Morton's enmities had always been intense and often they had assumed personal aspects, but their motivation was seldom if ever personal. Morton would have rejoiced in Bryan's success had it been based upon what he believed to be adherence to principle. Morton simply believed that Bryan had attained his success because he had pandered to the passions and prejudices of the public, had sold himself for votes. In a fight with a man whom he believed possessed great ability on the one hand and lacked strength of conviction on the other, Morton was unable to exercise restraint.

The columns of *The Conservative* berated the Boy Orator with merciless persistence. Morton attempted to overthrow Bryan by reasoning; he railed at him with ridicule. He turned the white light of scornful publicity not only upon Bryan's public career but upon his private life. With fine sarcasm he explained the term "Bryanarchy": "The difference between anarchy and Bryanarchy is that the former believes in *no* government at all, and the latter believes in no government *without* Bryan. No government is bad enough, and why any sane citizen should yearn for anything worse, is beyond comprehension."¹⁵ When Bryan announced that he had purchased a small farm near Lincoln and planned to build a home on it, *The Conservative* jeered at the project as "The House that Gab Built."

The October 12, 1899 issue of *The Conservative* featured an electrotyped copy of a letter Bryan had written to Morton in 1889, in which he had said, thanking him for his endorsement for a small political appointment: "I assure you that it is the money that is in the office & not the honor that attracts me. If successful in getting it, it will tide me over my beginning here." Morton had built up to the publication of the letter by giving interviews to the Republican papers of Omaha and Lincoln and hinting in *The Conservative* that Bryan had once said that he had wanted an office only for the money that was in it. His object, as he explained privately to C. H. Gere

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IV:11, September 19, 1901, 2.

of the *Nebraska State Journal* and Edward Rosewater of the *Omaha Bee*, was to goad Bryan into a denial of the statement so that he could give the indicting letter to the public.¹⁶

The publication of the letter did not produce the supposed effect. Conservatives, who already were convinced, pointed to the letter as positive proof that the silver tongue was wagged by golden dollars, but among other groups the publication of the letter appears to have redounded to Bryan's favor rather than against him.¹⁷ Various persons wrote that the personal venom with which *The Conservative* discussed Bryan was hardly worthy of a man of Morton's position. Professor Arthur Latham Perry declared that Morton was "helping the hopes of McKinleyism more than any other man in the United States" and that he (Perry) was "constantly offended by . . . [Morton's] monstrous injustice to Bryan."¹⁸ To the editor of the *Lincoln Courier*, Miss Sarah B. Harris, who wondered if it were wise to have so much of Bryan in *The Conservative*, Morton wrote: "I agree with you that it is entirely irksome to have so much of Bryan and Bryanarchy in its columns. But last winter we had an epidemic of small-pox in Nebraska City and Otoe County, which compelled constant reference to that very disagreeable and loathsome disease until it was finally exterminated in this propinquity. Advertising that pestilence did not seem to prolong its existence. . . ." ¹⁹

The Conservative, in addition to being "A Weekly Journal devoted to the Discussion of Political, Economic and Sociological Questions," was the official organ of Morton's one-man crusade for a new political party.

In 1896 when the conservatives had bolted the Democratic Party, Morton had hoped that they would break entirely with the Democratic tradition and form a permanent "Conservative" party. The first few months of the McKinley Administration further convinced him of the need for such an organization, and even before he founded *The Conservative* he made an effort to promote a "Conservative" party. He wrote letters to prominent men all over the country urging them to get behind such a movement. Among them was Carl Schurz, to whom he wrote, typically, as follows:

¹⁶ Morton Letterbooks.

¹⁷ Cf. Morton Scrapbooks.

¹⁸ Perry to Morton, February 2, August 9, 1900.

¹⁹ Morton to Sarah B. Harris, November 13, 1899.

The currency question is the most important before the American people. The party in power, if it has any righteous convictions in favor of the gold standard, has not the courage to assert them. The machinery of the Democratic Party is in the hands of the advocates of the free coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1 in nearly all of the states of the Union.

The gold-standard Democrats are too thoroughly disgusted with the protective ideas of President McKinley, and too nauseated with the Dingley Bill and its results to ever again support a Republican candidate.

Has not the time arrived for the formation of a Conservative party in the United States? Do we not need an organization and fusing together of those good men of all parties who have character, reputation and property to conserve, if the Republic is to be perpetuated? Why not have a call for a National Conservative Convention, signed by four or five prominent Conservatives in each state and territory? Why not call such a convention for the 4th of July next to meet at Philadelphia in Independence Hall. Is it not time for men of brains and character to declare their independence of petty spoilsman partyism? . . .²⁰

Neither Schurz nor any other prominent man with whom Morton corresponded reacted favorably to the suggestion of a third party. Virtually all of them would agree that the choice of candidates and platforms offered by the old parties was neither wide nor attractive, but they were unable to see how a new party could have strength enough to change materially the course of events.

During the campaign of 1898, in order to help put down the Populists and the Bryan Democrats, Morton supported the Republicans in Nebraska "as the least of two evils."²¹ He was pleased to observe that during a campaign in which the Republicans elected a majority of the legislature and two out of six congressmen, *The Conservative* was more frequently copied by the Republican newspapers of the state than any other journal in the country.²² The Republican victory was by no means complete, but the control of the legislature made possible the election of a sound money man to succeed William V. Allen in the Senate, and thus remove from that body one of its outstanding advocates of free silver and other Populist doctrines.²³

²⁰ Morton to Carl Schurz, December 6, 1897.

²¹ Morton to C. H. Hergeshimer, Falls City, November 5, 1898.

²² Morton to Smalley, November 12, 1898.

²³ Judge M. L. Hayward of Nebraska City was elected to the Senate by the legislature in 1899. Morton had high respect for Judge Hayward and wrote his friends all over the country that the new Senator from Nebraska would be firm in his conservatism. Before he could be sworn into office, however, Judge Hayward died, and Governor William A. Poynter, elected by the Democrats and the Populists, appointed Allen to succeed himself.

Concerning Morton's own vote a story was circulated that he not only had voted the straight Republican ticket but had signed his name at the bottom of the ballot. Those who spread the story declared that by this token Morton was seeking admission to the Republican Party, and prominent Republicans wrote to welcome the ancient enemy of Republicanism into their fold.²⁴

The story was untrue. Although he revolted against the "Bryanarchy" rampant in his own party, Morton could never have joined the party of McKinley, Hanna, and Quay. The campaign of 1898 with the unpleasant necessity of "choosing the lesser of two evils" strengthened Morton's opinion that a new party was necessary to the health of the Republic, and immediately after the elections, he revived his agitation for a third party which conservatives could support without qualification. He hoped to attract Republicans who disapproved of President McKinley's foreign policy, as well as conservative Democrats. He urged that an organization be perfected at once so that it might exert influence in the campaign of 1900. He was sanguine that a "Conservative" party which could "easily be formed by a realignment of the best elements of existing political organizations would advance civilization by ignoring all the fallacies and follies of the old parties and proclaiming itself for an honest, frugal and constitution-respecting administration of national affairs."²⁵ As he had hoped in 1897 that a conservative convention might be held in Independence Hall in Philadelphia on July 4, 1898, so he hoped in 1898 that a similar convention might be held in the same place on July 4, 1899.

Against objections that it would take many years and great energies to organize and discipline a new party, he placed the same objections made by the Whig papers in 1854 when the Republican party held its first conventions in Michigan, Ohio, and other states. Those objections were not verified then and Morton saw no reason why they should be verified with regard to the proposed new party. They surely were not significant when the need of the country was considered:

. . . The country needs a party to work for the republic and its betterment in every department of government. The United States has suffered from a surplus

²⁴ Morton Mss., especially D. H. Mercer to Morton, December 10, 1898.

²⁵ *The Conservative*, I:19, November 17, 1898, 3.

of statesmanship seeking to exalt individuals instead of principles. It is time to bring to the front that citizenship which is ambitious to do for the government instead of that too common brand which desires the government to do everything for it.

The United States needs men who are capable of forgetting individual or class interests for the sake of promoting peace and laying the foundations of permanent prosperity.

The great masses of the people need educated, fearless and patriotic leaders, not—what they have now in superabundance—mere followers, demagogues who will agree that the moon is made of green cheese if the multitude so declares.²⁶

A new party, if it were able to do nothing else, would be successful because it would give the conservative citizens of the country an organization which they could support with enthusiasm:

These voters, numbering tens of thousands of the best and most sincerely patriotic citizens, are inexorably antagonized to many dominant methods in the present republican and present democratic organizations.

These people are for all that is good and beneficent in the capable, honest administration of a popular government. They are influenced by reason. They are not the slaves of prejudice. They cannot be carried away by emotions. They are conservative; not radical. They are constructive; not destructive.

They find no satisfaction, no safety in either the policies or the administrative capacities of either of the two old parties. . . .

The better citizenship of the United States should evolve a new, a sober, a thoughtful, a high-minded, a patriotic, conservative party. It could intelligently solve new questions.²⁷

As had been customary with most of Morton's opinions since his appointment to President Cleveland's cabinet in 1893, his views on the need of a third party received wide publicity throughout the country. The press does not appear to have been favorable to the idea.²⁸ This did not bother Morton, for though he was sincere in his advocacy of a "Conservative" party, he thrived on controversy and showed no inclination to allow his desire for a new political organization to drive him to the ordinary methods of the politician in order to conciliate objectors and make friends for his cause. If a cause had any worth it would make friends of itself; if it were unworthy Morton would not stoop to make friends for it. Then, too, Morton was an editor, and it was not for nothing that he had got his first journalistic experience under Wilbur F. Storey of "print the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I:20, November 24, 1898, 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I:23, December 15, 1898, 7.

²⁸ Cf. Morton Scrapbooks.

news and raise Hell" fame. *The Conservative* lumped the opponents of a new party that would bear its name into two classes: "the low-browed disciples of Quayism, among the republicans, who believe larceny from the state a perquisite of politics . . . [and] another large mass of citizens who believe that the maintenance of law and order through the use of the writ of injunction and the federal troops to enforce the mandates of the federal courts is inimical to good government."²⁹

An organization that Morton thought at one time might have within it the seeds of a possibly acceptable third party was the Anti-Imperialist League formed to oppose the extension of American territory by conquest. Morton was chosen to preside over the first conference of the league, held in Chicago in October 1899. Speakers included Carl Schurz, Bourke Cochran, and Edward Atkinson. More than thirty states were represented at the conference by one hundred and fifty delegates. Large crowds thronged to hear the speeches. Morton was of the opinion that those who opposed imperialism would be able to determine the election of 1900, even though, like the gold Democrats of 1896, they were "forced . . . to decide between two evils and to advance that evil which seems the least."³⁰

The anti-imperialist movement, however, did not develop as Morton had supposed it would. Colonel William Jennings Bryan, who had commanded the Third Nebraska Volunteers against the real American enemy during the war with Spain—disease in a Southern training camp—had come to the conclusion that the peace was not to be prosecuted with the same high principles under which the war had been fought.³¹ Upon resigning his commission Colonel Bryan enlisted in the crusade against imperialism and by the time of the campaign of 1900, he had captured the movement begun at Chicago. The Democratic National Convention, held at Kansas City, renominated Colonel Bryan and declared imperialism to be the paramount issue of the campaign.³² Many who had opposed Bryan in 1896 were now attracted by his crusade against imperialism. Among them

²⁹ *The Conservative*, I:39, April 6, 1899, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II:16, October 26, 1899, 1.

³¹ Long, *Bryan, The Great Commoner*, 128-129; Genevieve Forbes Herrick and John Origen Herrick, *The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (Chicago, 1925), 189.

³² McKee, *The National Conventions and Platforms of All Political Parties, 1789 to 1905*, 333.

were Louis R. Ehrich, who declared that imperialism was much more important than free silver at its worst and warned Morton against being influenced by personal considerations;³³ and Professor Arthur Latham Perry, who declared that the reasons given by Morton in *The Conservative* for opposing the election of Bryan on an anti-imperialist platform were "hollow as an old brass kettle."³⁴

Morton would not have supported Bryan on any platform because he believed him to be a political fraud. He would not have supported anyone on the Kansas City platform because, while it declared imperialism to be the paramount issue, it reaffirmed the principles of the Democratic platform of 1896 and declared again for the free coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1. Of the platform of 1896 Morton had written: "That platform is an everlasting blight upon the party that promulgated it, and upon the republic which it threatens. . . . Real democrats, men who believe in popular government, will never support the fallacies and vagaries of that pronunciamiento so long as they retain breath and reason, nor will they vote for allegedly democratic nominees until after the Chicago manifesto of 1896 shall have been renounced as a heresy and denounced as a menace to good order."³⁵

Morton's oft-expressed opinion that only repudiation of the Chicago platform would save the Democracy was in good company. It was supported by his "great and good friend . . . in whose patriotism, vast common-sense and good judgment . . . [he had] come to have an everlasting faith,"³⁶ Grover Cleveland. Before the convention the former President wrote from Princeton that he had expressed Morton's opinion often, and in almost the same words, and that he too would oppose Bryan regardless of the platform upon which he ran. Democratic harmony under Bryan's leadership would, in Cleveland's opinion, "lead to a kind of shiftiness and attempts at hoodwinking that wont deceive anybody nor wipe off the 'deep damnation' of the unrepudiated Chicago platform and the unrepentant Bryan."³⁷

As late as May 1900, Morton had hoped that the conservative

³³ Louis R. Ehrich to Morton, July 17, 1900.

³⁴ Perry to Morton, August 20, 1900.

³⁵ *The Conservative*, I:38, March 30, 1899, 1.

³⁶ Morton to Daniel S. Lamont, January 20, 1898.

³⁷ Grover Cleveland to Morton, February 7, 1900.

citizens of the country would hold a convention, reaffirm the national Democratic principles of 1896, and nominate candidates for the presidency and vice presidency "of such high character and attainments and experience as to attract the thoughtful ballots of this republic to their support." He, however, "had no ambition to formulate platforms, get up delegations or organize conventions."³⁸

Although during the first McKinley Administration Morton was the outstanding exponent of a third party based on conservative lines he never had been prepared to take the initiative in the actual work of calling a convention and setting up the machinery of a political party. He had frankly hoped that he would be able to stir others to such action. After the renomination of Bryan, he did not even believe that a third party organization would be advisable. He declined to meet with a group at Indianapolis who hoped to nominate a third ticket, declaring that nothing should be done to make possible the election of Bryan. As much as he desired it, he did not believe that in 1900 he could afford the luxury of a vote that would have been a pleasure to cast. He wrote to Louis R. Ehrich:

. . . My own opinion is decidedly against a third ticket of any kind. McKinleyism is bitter, nauseating to the taste and revolting to my digestion. But when I am sick, I take blue mass, quinine, asafetida, and all sorts of dirty drugs in order that I may become well again. Therefore I am about prepared to take my political medicine this autumn, intensely repellent as the dose is. . . .³⁹

The only redeeming feature of the situation was the presence of Governor Theodore Roosevelt on the Republican ticket as candidate for the vice presidency. Morton had admired Roosevelt's work on behalf of civil service reform. He had a high regard for the Governor's courage, honesty, and ability. Moreover, his second son, Paul Morton, was one of Governor Roosevelt's close personal friends. Part of Roosevelt's strenuous campaign was conducted from Paul's business car on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (of which he was a vice president) as his guest. Paul had wanted his father to accompany them on a trip into Oklahoma, but Morton had no desire to see all of the Republican politicians who would board the car to meet the Governor. He asked Paul instead to tell Roosevelt "that if the ticket

³⁸ Morton to William P. Tomlinson, Topeka, Kansas, May 12, 1900.

³⁹ Morton to Ehrich, July 15, 1900.

upon which he is running is elected, I hope he will immediately proceed to inoculate Mr. McKinley with backbone." ⁴⁰

Morton's vote for McKinley gave him less satisfaction than any other he had cast during his entire life. McKinley's re-election was not, in Morton's opinion, based upon any merits which he possessed, but "upon the demerits of Colonel Bryan, who represented discontent and money fallacies." ⁴¹

Morton did not like the necessity of always choosing between two evils. He feared for the future of "a republic which is reduced to the necessity of choosing for its Chief Executive between Bryan and McKinley." ⁴² Hence, as soon as Bryan had once more been sidetracked he began to urge again the formation of a new party, "in favor of sound money, tariff for revenue only, honest administration and strict construction of the constitution, and an inflexible and inexorable administration of the laws as interpreted by the courts." ⁴³

If the idea had met with but little enthusiasm during the first McKinley Administration, it met with even less during the second, and, after the assassination of McKinley, the Administration of Theodore Roosevelt. Morton wrote a few editorials in *The Conservative* and gave an occasional interview on the subject, but he did not press it. He had much more confidence in Roosevelt than he had in McKinley, and was sure that he would make "a most excellent and fearless Executive for this great Republic." ⁴⁴

Morton had taken the third party idea seriously but he had never been willing to do more than to advocate it with his pen. His last serious political agitation had won virtually no converts.

Soon after the election of 1900 the menace of "Bryanarchy" appeared in a new form, and turned Morton's attention altogether from the third party. The twice-defeated presidential aspirant announced that he planned to publish a weekly paper in Lincoln, to be called *The Commoner*. Morton wrote: "*The Conservative* welcomes *The Commoner*—which 'will defend the principles set forth in the Kansas City platform'—with unalloyed satisfaction. If there is anything more in need of defense than the political deliverance afore-

⁴⁰ Morton to Paul Morton, June 30, 1900.

⁴¹ Diary, November 7, 1900.

⁴² Morton to Olney, April 16, 1900.

⁴³ Morton to Sawyer, November 10, 1900.

⁴⁴ Morton to Theodore Roosevelt, October 8, 1901.

said it has not been brought to public notice. The opinion commonly held is that commoner platitudes than the Kansas City platform are uncommon.”⁴⁵

The press looked forward to a battle between the two country papers, each with a national circulation, being published in Nebraska.⁴⁶ The “unalloyed satisfaction” expressed in *The Conservative* at the commencement of *The Commoner* was a sincere statement of Morton’s views. He would have welcomed an editorial duel with the young Lothario out of Lincoln. The duel never materialized. Young Mr. Bryan had many years ahead of him and was looking far to the future—too far to be much concerned with the old man at Arbor Lodge who had always been in the minority anyway, and who might, if given a chance and not forced to compete with the young and vigorous Bryan lungs, have got the better of the match. Moreover, the fighting years of *The Conservative* were rapidly running out.

⁴⁵ *The Conservative*, III:24, December 20, 1900, 11.

⁴⁶ Cf. Morton Scrapbooks.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE SAGE OF ARBOR LODGE

HIS WEEKLY PAPER *The Conservative* provided occupation for Morton's active mind and vigorous pen during the years following his retirement from official life. He gave it much time and energy, and it is improbable that he could have been satisfied without it or similar activity to keep him busy. An increasing amount of the solid satisfactions of his life, however, came from Arbor Lodge, and the four sons who had grown up there, who now had built homes of their own, and who had made themselves careers which filled their father with pride.

Morton's devotion to his own home and the homes of the nation was an important attribute of his character, an important aspect of his political belief. In his writing and speaking he often employed the phrase first used in his Centennial Address at Nebraska City on July 4, 1876: "Love of Home is Primary Patriotism." The broad basis of what he had hoped would be a "Conservative" party was his belief that men who owned and loved their homes had a greater stake in good government than those who did not. The widespread home ownership prevailing in the United States had caused him to believe that a "Conservative" party, under vigorous leadership, could have a large membership and wide influence.

The institution of Arbor Day was another aspect of Morton's concern for the homes of the country. His boyhood in verdant southern Michigan had not prepared him to accept the barren soddies, baking under the hot Nebraska sun, as a desirable environ-

ment in which to build a home and rear a family. Much of the non-political effort of his work on the pioneer *Nebraska City News* had been to inculcate in his readers an appreciation of the value of trees, and a belief that the soil and climate of Nebraska would produce trees as well as crops of grain and hay. The setting aside of one day each year on which to plant trees redounded primarily to the benefit of the homes of the state. Commercial orchards and groves would not be built up by planting trees one day a year, but one day a year devoted to planting trees about the houses and grounds of the farms of the state would go far toward making the transformation from barrenness to beauty. That Morton had this aspect of Arbor Day clearly in his thinking is evident in all of his writing upon the subject.

Morton watched the spread of Arbor Day with intense satisfaction. All Nebraskans recognized its importance, and in honor of the man who gave the idea to the world, the state legislature in 1885 had designated Morton's birthday, April 22, as Arbor Day and had made it a legal holiday. From its beginnings in Nebraska in 1872, it had spread in two decades to every state in the Union except Delaware.¹ It was observed in many foreign countries.

A practice particularly gratifying to Morton was the observance of Arbor Day in the schools. This was begun in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1882, when the school children of that city, during a conference of the American Forestry Congress, planted trees at Eden Park. They set the pattern of subsequent Arbor Day celebrations by school children when each child dedicated a tree to a person of importance in the city, state, or nation.² At the meeting of the National Education Association in Washington, in February 1884, a paper was read on "Arbor Day in the Schools." It called forth the comment, "This subject is out of place here." In August of the same year, however, the association, meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, unanimously adopted a resolution favoring the celebration of Arbor Day in the schools of the country.³

Morton considered the adoption of Arbor Day by the schools the most important aspect of the holiday's development. It appealed to

¹ Eggleston, *Arbor Day: Its History and Observance* (Washington, 1896), 18-19.

² John B. Peaslee, *Thoughts and Experiences In and Out of School* (Cincinnati, 1900), 111.

³ Eggleston, *op. cit.*, 27.

his sense of the fitness of things. He was fond of saying: "Other holidays repose upon the past; Arbor Day proposes for the future." Celebrated by children it was more than ever a holiday of the future, for when a child planted a tree not only did he do a work from which the community might benefit, but also one from which he, in later years, might benefit himself. Moreover, developing in children an interest in trees could not help but have a beneficial effect upon the homes of the future. Tree planting possessed distinct educational values.

The education of youth was a subject on which Morton thought much during the later years of his life. He had always been interested in the careers and problems of young men and had helped many a boy get his first job. Two young men in particular who felt Morton's influence in their formative years were Rudolph Evans and Haskell Coffin. Evans, who was to become noted as a sculptor, was the son of an employee of the Department of Agriculture, and was encouraged to continue his work by the Secretary who took time to sit for a bust at the hands of the young man. Coffin, the painter, received one of his first large commissions from Morton—a painting to commemorate the treaty signed between the United States and the Pawnee Indians in 1857. Numerous editorials in *The Conservative* reflect his interest in youth, as does a special issue of the paper devoted to a symposium on education. Consistent with his views that the functions of all government, local, state, and national, should be kept at a bare minimum, Morton looked with disfavor upon widening the scope of free public education. Such education, he firmly believed, should be confined to the traditional rudiments.

He wrote in *The Conservative*:

Is the State going too far when it pays for producing doctors and lawyers at the University and certificates them as ready and competent to practice? Is it the duty of the State to expend five hundred dollars in preparing a man to practice law or medicine any more than it is the duty of the State to present another man five hundred dollars with which to begin the grocery business or purchase ten acres of land for a home?⁴

Morton's opposition to training youth at public expense for specific occupations was rooted deeply in his uncompromising belief that the government should commit no positive act which would

⁴ *The Conservative*, IV:19, November 14, 1901, 2.

aid an individual as such. In his opinion the country could get along with the number of doctors, lawyers, teachers, and engineers who were able to secure their training at their own expense. Further, Morton believed that when a university undertook to train for a specific profession or occupation it perverted its primary function—that of education—to mere training. He frequently expressed his opinions on the subject. One of the better of those expressions was in a letter to an old friend who had observed: "I am inclined to feel that we are overworking 'Intellectual culture.'"

Possibly it would be better to say that we are overworking intellectual irritation. The universities of this day are filled with students working almost exclusively for degrees and many of those degrees are for specialties. Formerly the student was inspired to intellectual effort because of his love of knowledge and because of insatiable thirst for knowledge. The universities and colleges of this day seem willing to sacrifice everything for numbers. Each one desires to boast of an attendance of from one thousand to three thousand students. Quantity rather than quality seems sought for in all the educational institutions of the country. There is only a small percentage of the studentship of the United States at the present time taking the regular, old-fashioned classical and mathematical course. It may be that the supply of that class of learned men and women which the old curriculum provided outran the demand; but if that be true, when and where will the supply of specialists—half-educated men and women, whose intellects are only freckled here and there with little splotches of learning—find a corresponding demand? . . .⁵

Morton felt that the success of his four sons gave him the right to express himself upon the subject of education. His fellow citizens, though they seldom agreed with him, were willing to grant a respectful hearing to his opinions on any subject, and during his later years Morton was referred to, by friend and foe alike, as "The Sage of Arbor Lodge."

The appellation accurately described his position in the life of his community. Beautiful Arbor Lodge, lying on the crest of a hill to the west of the town, had for years been the show place of the county. Its proprietor had long lived in what for Nebraska was "the grand manner." The well appointed carriage, drawn by the sleek, spirited horses was a familiar sight on the streets of Nebraska City. Frequently it was drawn up at one of the town's two railway stations

⁵ Morton to Watkins, January 17, 1898.

where its owner awaited the arrival of guests—often men and women of importance in the state and nation.

The hospitality of Arbor Lodge was traditional, almost legendary. While Mrs. Morton lived and the four sons were at home, gay, youthful parties were frequent. After her death and the departure of the four sons to business and the building of their own homes, much of the gayety had gone, but always there was the warm hospitality, the cordial welcome. Morton's unmarried sister, Miss Emma, was a cultured, gracious, and experienced hostess. Miss Mary French Morton, a first cousin, also lived at Arbor Lodge for many years and wrote verses for *The Conservative*. Often during the long summer evenings guests from town would be on the wide verandas, enjoying a quiet smoke and vigorous conversation.

The driveway led past the porch, and friends and neighbors, out in buggies to enjoy the cool of the evening, often would halt their horses and enjoy a chat. Morton would be seated at the southeast corner of the porch where there was always a breeze, his chair tilted back against the corner pillar. On many evenings there would be a regular procession of townspeople and visitors. Each would chat a while and then drive on. If the flies were bad, the stamping of the horses on the brick drive sometimes made conversation difficult.

Often people from out of town, whom Morton hadn't seen for years, would hire a rig and drive out for a visit when spending the night in Nebraska City. Occasionally these visits would severely tax Morton's remarkable memory for names and faces. One evening, for example, a large, black-bearded man drove up in one of Levi's rigs. He said, "Mr. Morton, you don't recognize me." Morton said, "You're right, but give me a moment." The man smiled and sat there. Morton then said: "You came through here with a covered wagon in '77, and camped for a few days at the northeast corner, down by the ravine in the orchard. Your wife was not feeling well, and Mrs. Morton did a few little things to make her more comfortable. Your name is Casey. You weren't wearing a beard then." The man was astonished. He said, "Mr. Morton, you have all the incidents correct except one—my name is Murphy."

Poor people often found their way in financial distress either to Arbor Lodge or the office of *The Conservative*, and those who were anxious to aid a needy friend or relative never failed to see the Sage of Arbor Lodge. They seldom, if ever, were disappointed in getting



STATUE IN ARBOR LODGE STATE PARK, NEBRASKA CITY, NEBRASKA
BY RUDOLPH EVANS



STATUE IN HALL OF FAME, WASHINGTON
ALSO SCULPTURED BY RUDOLPH EVANS

the gift or small loan they sought. Morton, whose political philosophy inclined him to the belief that every man should stand on his own feet, often chided himself in his diary, fearful—though his generous spirit could not have made him otherwise—that he was “an easy mark.” Occasionally, to salve his individualistic conscience, he would insist upon proper business form, and get security for his loan; but while his mind would insist that he must have security, his heart would accept mere tokens, as, for example, the time he loaned fifty dollars to an old soldier, secured by a badge of the Grand Army of the Republic.

An important reason for Morton's position as patriarch of the community was that his name was associated with virtually all of its improvements. For many of them he or his sons were wholly responsible. Morton Park had been a gift to Nebraska City by J. Sterling Morton. The public library had been built by Joy Morton. Capital of the sons had been invested in a starch works, a packing plant, a cereal mill, a creamery, stockyards, an elevator, and the printing company. The family had built the “Overland” theatre, “as fine as any in the Middle West outside of Chicago,” which for a time brought the best in road shows to Nebraska City. Morton found great pleasure in the theatre and frequently was seen in his box. Occasionally the actors were entertained at Arbor Lodge.⁶

Morton probably would have passed his last years in relative happiness and contentment and might even have lived on well past his three score years and ten, had not his youngest son, Carl, died suddenly of double pneumonia, on January 7, 1901, at his home in Waukegan, Illinois. This, the second great tragedy of his life, removed virtually all happiness, all sense of contentment.

Since the death of his wife in 1881, the great source of joy and inspiration in Morton's life had been the careers of his four sons.

* The Mortons have continued to contribute generously to the home town, Nebraska City. Within the last fifteen years Joy Morton built a new addition to the City Library, adding more than fifty per cent to the original book space; Joy and Mark each contributed \$5,000 to St. Mary's Hospital and later Mark built at his own suggestion the beautiful vestibule to the hospital which conforms in style to the architecture of the original building; Mark and Joy each also made generous contributions to the Memorial Building, erected by the citizens to honor patriots in all wars; and Joy made contributions to St. Mary's Episcopal Church in which he was baptized while an infant.

The success of each had made him proud, and he never spoke of them that he did not declare the honor they bore to the memory of their mother. He recaptured in a sense his own youth through frequent visits to their homes. His grandchildren, particularly the two oldest boys, Joy's son Sterling and Carl's son Wirt, were frequently at Arbor Lodge.

Carl's death, however, broke the circle. Never did Morton see his sons together without mourning for the one who had gone. As he did just after Caroline's death, he poured out his soul at great length in his diary. There is hardly a day's entry in 1901 that does not contain anguished mention of his loss.

He did not give himself up completely to sorrow, however, but maintained his lifelong habit of activity. He continued to write regularly for *The Conservative*, and was busy with plans to improve the paper and increase its circulation. He spoke rather frequently, addressing farmers or business men, or—especially—old settlers. His always voluminous correspondence was carried on undiminished, and with characteristically meticulous attention to detail in its preservation. His sons and friends often invited him to accompany them on trips. Occasionally he accepted. In August he accompanied his son Paul and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt in Paul's car to Colorado to attend a celebration of the anniversary of that state's admission into the Union in 1876. Morton recalled that in 1876 he had campaigned in Colorado in the interest of Samuel J. Tilden's election to the presidency. While in Colorado he was the guest of Louis R. Ehrich. Another guest of Ehrich's was the novelist Hamlin Garland, whom Morton found very congenial. The two men had long talks about the Middle Border they knew so well.

He assisted, by correspondence, in the organization of the International Society of Arboriculture, and was chosen the first president of the society.⁷ The office was purely honorary, as the secretary, John P. Brown of Connersville, Indiana, carried on the work of the organization.

The last work of a public nature which Morton accepted was an appointment from Governor E. P. Savage as a member of the Nebraska Board of Commissioners for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition to be held in St. Louis in 1903. Morton had long opposed the

⁷ John P. Brown, Connersville, Indiana, to Morton, May 22, 1901.

expenditure of public funds to aid expositions of any kind, and at the only meeting of the board which he attended, he moved that it not petition the legislature for any funds but instead appeal to private sources for subscriptions. The motion carried.⁸

On December 4, 1901, he delivered a speech before the National Livestock Association in Chicago. He had for several days been suffering from a severe cold, and the trip to Chicago and home again, together with the speech, aggravated it so much that he was unable to throw it off. In an attempt to seek relief from the disorder, he accompanied his son Paul on a trip to Mexico in February. On the trip his strength declined rapidly, and on March 2 he returned to Arbor Lodge, as he wrote in the next to his last diary entry, "in a very dilapidated state physically and intellectually."⁹

He planned "as soon as the weather gets a little milder," to plant trees as was his custom each spring, and also to extend the brick drive that ran along the north side of the house.¹⁰ The last tree planting never came.

After his return from Mexico, his health sank rapidly, and he was seldom able to leave his bed. He visited the office of *The Conservative* only once after March. On April 5, he was removed to the home of his son Mark, in Lake Forest, Illinois, so that he might have the care of specialists. For a short time after his arrival at the home of his son he appeared to gain in strength, but then lost it quickly. He was unconscious on his seventieth birthday, with a clot in an artery of the brain. At four-thirty on the afternoon of Sunday, April 27, he died, having never regained consciousness.

A special train, draped in mourning, brought the body from Chicago to Nebraska City. Hundreds of sorrowing fellow townsmen were at the depot to pay respectful tribute to the great man who had lived among them. For three hours the body lay in state in the public library, and thousands filed by the coffin. Then the journey was renewed. Through streets draped in black and between flags at half mast, the Sage of Arbor Lodge came home for the last time. The Governor and other state officers came from Lincoln to pay the official respects of the state to his memory. Special trains brought distinguished citizens of the West to his funeral. The gray heads of

⁸ *The Conservative*, IV:30, January 30, 1902, 11.

⁹ Diary, March 2, 1902.

¹⁰ Morton to Joy Morton, March 12, 1902.

territorial pioneers were visible in the vast throng that had come to pay final tribute to the man who had given his life to build faith in the new land. That afternoon Morton was carried from Arbor Lodge and laid to rest in Wyuka at the side of Caroline and Carl, to become forever a part of the soil of Nebraska.

And in Nebraska it was spring. From morning till night on the day of the funeral the perfect blue of the Nebraska sky was unbroken, a soft south breeze played among the leaves, and the sun shone with the gentle heat of the first warm days of summer. At Arbor Lodge the orchards were in full bloom.

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This collection, permanently deposited in the University of Nebraska Library by the Morton family, and indexed and catalogued under the supervision of the author, is the primary source for this biography. It consists of the following:

Approximately 75,000 letters written to J. Sterling Morton, 1845-1902.

58 letterbooks of 500 pages each (with the exception of one book of 1,000 pages) containing copies of letters written by J. Sterling Morton, 1874-1902.

3 letterbooks containing copies of J. Sterling Morton's official correspondence as Secretary of Agriculture, 1893-1897.

49 diaries and farm journals kept by J. Sterling Morton.

1 journal used by J. Sterling Morton as Secretary of the Territory of Nebraska, 1858-1861.

43 scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, from newspapers in all parts of the United States, 1865-1902.

77 bound volumes of miscellaneous pamphlets conserved by J. Sterling Morton.

60 volumes of pamphlets, most of which bear imprints before 1825. At one time they belonged to General John A. Dix. Probably a unique collection.

3 albums of photographs.

Approximately 500 volumes of miscellaneous works, largely Western Americana.

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